



CITY OF BELLAIRE TEXAS

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

MAY 10, 2016

Council Chamber

Regular Session

5:30 PM

7008 S. RICE AVENUE
BELLAIRE, TX 77401

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF QUORUM

Chairman Frazier called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, and announced that a quorum was present, consisting of the following members:

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Christopher Butler	Commissioner	Present	
Winfred Frazier	Chairman	Present	
Bill Thorogood	Commissioner	Present	5:35 PM
Paul Simmons	Commissioner	Present	
Marc Steinberg	Commissioner	Absent	
Dirk Stiggins	Vice Chairman	Present	
S. Lynne Skinner	Commissioner	Present	
John McDonald	Director	Present	
Ashley Parcus	Secretary	Present	
Trisha S. Pollard	Council Member	Present	

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PAST MEETINGS

1. Planning and Zoning Commission - Regular Session - Apr 12, 2016 6:00 PM

RESULT:	APPROVED [4 TO 0]
MOVER:	Dirk Stiggins, Vice Chairman
SECONDER:	S. Lynne Skinner, Commissioner
AYES:	Butler, Frazier, Stiggins, Skinner
ABSTAIN:	Simmons
ABSENT:	Thorogood, Steinberg

III. REMINDER TO CITIZENS DESIRING TO ADDRESS THE COMMISSION

Chairman Frazier reminded all citizens who wished to speak to the Commission to fill out a sign in sheet.

IV. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

Persons at the meeting who have indicated their desire to be heard on matters of general interest to the Commission by submitting the form provided shall have three minutes to present their comments. The Commission is not permitted to fully discuss, debate, or consider items that are not on the agenda. Questions presented to the Commission may be referred to staff.

There were no general public comments.

V. CURRENT BUSINESS (ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION, AND/OR POSSIBLE ACTION)

1. Proposed amendments to the Code of Ordinances, Chapter 24, Planning and Zoning, Sec. 24-535, R-MF Residential Multi-Family District, and related sections, in order to ensure that future re-developments are compatible with the existing commercial regulations, and to establish proper buffering of existing adjacent single-family developments.

Mr. McDonald explained that he had again made some proposed changes to the R-MF Zoning District in an attempt to bring it in line with recent amendments made to other zoning districts within the City. He added that in doing this, the City will have more control over what would/could be developed within that area.

Commissioner Butler mentioned that the proposed language states that if the administrator denies the site plan then it would come before the Planning and Zoning Commission. He asked how the Commission would be able to handle that, as they are not in the position to grant a variance like the Board of Adjustment, nor would it require a specific use permit.

Mr. McDonald explained that an applicant would appeal to the Commission if they disagree with a zoning decision made by the Director.

Commissioner Butler also mentioned that the terms "he" and "his" when referring to the administrator are gender specific and asked if that could be changed.

Mr. McDonald explained that "administrator" is defined within the code, and specifically states that it is not intended to be a gender specific term.

Commissioner Skinner mentioned that there had been previous discussions about setting a minimum square footage of 900 for each unit within a multi-family development and asked for clarification as to why that was not being utilized.

Mr. McDonald reminded her that it had been decided that setting a maximum number of units rather than a minimum square footage would be more beneficial for the developer and the market.

Commissioner Skinner mentioned the language referring to corner lots and side yards that states "both street exposures shall be treated as front yards." She asked if this would apply to sidewalks, landscaping, etc.

Mr. McDonald explained that sidewalks will be required on any street frontage, and landscaping that isn't covered through the landscaping requirements would be more of a site plan issue. He added that the idea was just to ensure that as you turn the corner it is also setback off of the street for aesthetic purposes.

Commissioner Skinner stated that there are a lot of places within the City where that is not done.

Mr. McDonald explained that within the residential areas a corner lot will have two front yards unless the lot was created prior to the establishment of the zoning ordinances, which is the case for the majority of corner lots within the City. He added that Council has implemented a ten foot setback for lots that were established prior to that time.

Commissioner Thorogood asked if below grade parking would be permitted.

Mr. McDonald stated that the language sets a maximum height, but does allow for underground parking.

Commissioner Thorogood asked if the development would need to be sprinkled.

Mr. McDonald confirmed that it would.

Commissioner Thorogood pointed out that there is no allowance for a planned development.

Mr. McDonald explained that he was simply trying to maintain more control over what could be built there. He added that there is currently only one property in question.

Chairman Frazier asked Mr. McDonald if staff had spoken to any developers regarding the proposed changes.

Mr. McDonald informed the Commission that he has spoken with the owner of Pont Alba Apartments on several occasions about the redevelopment of that property. He added that he has positively received the proposed changes and sees them as a way to help him maximize the ability to redevelop.

Chairman Frazier asked what the next step would be if the Commission is comfortable moving forward with the amendments.

Mr. McDonald explained that a public hearing would be called for the June 14th meeting.

Commissioner Butler asked if the notification requirements would pertain to this public hearing.

Mr. McDonald explained that notification is required, but that he would need to look and see what the specific requirements are for a public hearing such as this one.

A motion was then made by Commissioner Butler and seconded by Commissioner Skinner to notify all properties within 500 feet of any property currently zoned R-MF.

Commissioner Thorogood amended that motion to include 1,000 feet, and it was seconded by Commissioner Butler.

Vice Chairman Stiggins was concerned that the Commission would be setting a precedence in changing the notification to 1,000 feet for this public hearing.

Mr. McDonald agreed that the Commission needs to be careful about deviating from the standards.

Commissioner Thorogood felt that the fact that this is currently the only multi-family unit within the community makes this a unique situation.

Chairman Frazier agreed that making an exception for this public hearing could cause an issue with residents in the future.

Commissioner Thorogood asked if there is anything other than public notice that will help to educate the public on what is taking place.

Mr. McDonald informed him that all of the public hearing notices are put on the City's website and also sent out in a Notify Me to all subscribers.

Commissioner Thorogood withdrew his amendment.

Vote on the original motion of 500 feet: 6-0.

2. Presentation of results of the Beautification Survey, as prepared by Christopher Butler, representative of Citizens for a Beautiful Bellaire.

Commissioner Christopher Butler, as a member of the Citizens for A Beautiful Bellaire (CBB), explained that this survey had come about due to the fact that the CBB wanted to find out if there were other citizens who were also passionate about beautification within the City of Bellaire. He stated that the purpose behind the survey was to help the CBB in understanding why people chose to live here and to dig into the specifics on how to make it a more beautiful community. Commissioner Butler informed the Commission that there were 1,021 responses, and 183,000 words were written. He stated that the participants spent 484 hours combined working on this survey. Commissioner Butler pointed out that rather than your normal survey which takes a poll or vote, this survey was trying to simulate a town hall meeting. He added that the size of the words reflect the number of times that the word was mentioned by the participants. Commissioner Butler stated that the word clouds may not necessarily agree with each other, it is simply a representation of what was written. He mentioned that he wanted this to be the town hall meeting that the City has never really had, but also to help the CBB determine what projects should be taken forward.

Mr. McDonald asked Commissioner Butler how he could determine that there were 1,000 people that participated.

Commissioner Butler stated that he could not be completely sure of the number of people, just the number of responses. He added that he did not do IP filtering in order to let multiple people within a household to take the survey. Commissioner Butler stated that he did kick some responses out that were clearly duplicates, but still felt comfortable that there were at least 1,000 participants.

Commissioner Butler then went through the pages and pointed out some of the more prominent words that were listed.

Commissioner Thorogood pointed out the section titled "The Importance of Defining Bellaire Pretty" and mentioned the paragraph where Bellaire's industrial history is defined. He pointed out that Bellaire's industrial history has been residential since day one and that is the City's branding.

Commissioner Butler explained that the point he was trying to make with this statement is that other communities tend to base their branding on a physical product, i.e. the Fort Worth Longhorn, and the Tyler Rose. He added that Bellaire's product is quite clearly homes, which makes it significantly harder to create a recognizable, unique logo.

Chairman Frazier stated that he felt as though community character is a big part of the Comprehensive Plan, and that this survey does play into how the community character of Bellaire is defined.

Commissioner Butler pointed out the section of the survey that reflects the current strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities within the City, and stated that he felt as though this would be a great tool for the boards and commissions to use in determining which ones are relevant to each group.

Mr. McDonald stated that most of the things mentioned are already addressed within the City's Comprehensive Plan and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), as well as new zoning codes.

Commissioner Butler felt that although several of these are touched on within these different documents, there are things that need to be honed in on to an extent that the Comprehensive Plan and CIP does not do.

Vice Chairman Stiggins pointed out that it is hard for people to envision these ideas until they are able to physically see them. He added that the new H-E-B will be a catalyst for re-development within the City.

Commissioner Butler mentioned that he didn't feel as though the Commission was able to give H-E-B's representatives any specifics on what the City would like their site to look like. He agreed that there are standards and regulations that each developer has to follow, but the desired character is not addressed. Commissioner Butler pointed out that creating character type standards would prevent the Commission from having to address each project individually.

Mr. McDonald pointed out that the Comprehensive Plan does address "a walkable downtown," as well as other aesthetic qualities that are desired for different areas of the City. He added that there are also zoning regulations that go hand in hand with the desired character of the City, i.e. trees, design standards, etc.

Commissioner Butler stated that there is a difference between it being addressed and making it marketable, actionable, and able to be defined by the Commission, or other groups within the City. He added that to him pictures of Sugar Land do not define "Bellaire pretty."

Vice Chairman Stiggins mentioned previous projects that Commissioner Butler has worked on for other cities and asked how consensus was built in those situations, in order to establish a standard.

Commissioner Butler stated that he normally designs a streetscape of the different desired characteristics reflected within the survey results in order to allow the participants to physically see what each would look like. He added that although it may be the majority speaking, ultimately an appointed board is who will make the decision.

Vice Chairman Stiggins agreed with Mr. McDonald that a lot of aesthetic elements are already addressed within the Comprehensive Plan. However, he also agreed with the importance of illustration and visual aids to help "sell" the ideas.

Commissioner Thorogood asked what would be left to do if downtown Bellaire was "fixed."

Commissioner Butler agreed that the downtown area is the biggest issue, with the most specific concerns, but he also felt that there are still improvements that can be made outside of that area. He mentioned that it has to do with downtown retail, specifically.

Mr. McDonald pointed out that turnover of the buildings, based on the rules that the City has in place, would essentially solve the problem. He added that it is very cyclical.

Commissioner Butler reiterated that the City is not the gorgeous thing that it could be if a consensus vision for "Bellaire pretty" was in place.

Mr. McDonald mentioned that rather than giving the Comprehensive Plan and new zoning district regulations a chance to work, the CBB is proposing things be changed.

Commissioner Butler stated that he doesn't feel as though the CBB is asking that anything be changed, just that more specific standards be put into place in order to achieve a more aesthetically pleasing city. He added that the Planning and Zoning Commission could be involved in this effort and asked the Commissioners to begin thinking about if/how they would like to do that.

Chairman Frazier stated that the Commission, along with Gary Mitchell of Kendig Keast Collaborative, worked very hard on the five-year update to the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that there are standards in place for Bellaire's future developments.

Commissioner Butler agreed that it is a really great tool to use, but stated that he would like to see more detailed district-wide blueprints or master plans to incorporate with it.

Commissioner Thorogood mentioned that the Comprehensive Plan took huge steps in creating a standard for architecture with regard to commercial developments. He added that it was really a question of "how far can we take this?" Commissioner Thorogood pointed out that the City's belief is that it is landowner's right to build what they can, that economically meets their needs, as well as the City's regulations, with the site that they have. He stated that it is not really the City's right to define it so tightly that the developer's hands are tied. Commissioner Thorogood mentioned that he is concerned that the beautification effort could potentially overshadow the Comprehensive Plan. He then asked Mr. McDonald if there were streetscape standards within the newly adopted zoning districts.

Mr. McDonald explained that there are landscaping requirements, but there are no specific streetscape plans. He added that there are several options that the City is looking into implementing in order to set those standards and get the ball rolling for redevelopment.

Commissioner Skinner mentioned that there have recently been an abundance of younger families moving into Bellaire. She agreed that there should probably be higher standards in some areas, but felt that this would happen organically based on the lifecycle changes that are occurring within the City. Commissioner Skinner added that if the standards become too specific it may deter prospects that are looking to come into Bellaire.

Commissioner Thorogood pointed out that a "quick fix" for this would be to add an economic development function, which the City currently does not have.

Chairman Frazier also mentioned that the survey results would be very beneficial for the Commission to utilize during the next update to the Comprehensive Plan. He then asked what the participants were referring to with "maintenance failures."

Commissioner Butler stated that it includes things like broken curbs and leaning poles, etc. He added that some of them are out of the City's control and deal more with CenterPoint and Metro. Commissioner Butler also felt that recently the City has improved in its response to maintenance issues.

Commissioner Simmons felt that this beautification effort needs to have an anchor, and that the Comprehensive Plan should serve that purpose. He added that these results portray many differing opinions, and that there is no way to get everyone on board.

Commissioner Butler agreed that there are always going to be those differences, but he felt that there was a lot of consensus within the survey results. He added that City Council is hearing the proposal for a beautification master plan on June 6th, and he felt as though feedback from the Planning and Zoning Commission would be very beneficial.

Chairman Frazier felt that the Commissioners should at least lend their support, or comments to Council. He thanked Commissioner Butler for his presentation.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

There were no committee reports.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

VIII. REQUESTS FOR NEW BUSINESS, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND COMMENTS

A. Staff liaison report on the status of projects previously addressed by the commission as well as projects for future meetings.

Mr. McDonald informed the Commission that the specific use permit for Veritas Christian Academy will be going before City Council on June 6th.

B. The Chairman shall recognize any Commissioner who wishes to bring New Business to the attention of the Commission. Consideration of New Business shall be for the limited purpose of determining whether the matter is appropriate for inclusion of a future Agenda of the Commission or for the referral to staff for investigation.

Commissioner Stiggins suggested that an item be added to a future agenda of the Commission, or a workshop be held in order to discuss the Commission's role in the Citizens For a Beautiful Bellaire's beautification efforts.

Commissioner Thorogood asked if there were any regulations in the current code with regard to drones.

Mr. McDonald stated that he did not believe that they were specifically addressed within the code.

Commissioner Thorogood mentioned the current litigation in Friendswood with regard to churches and property taxes. He asked if that would be within the Commission's purview if it were to ever happen within the City of Bellaire.

Mr. McDonald stated that it would not.

Chairman Frazier asked about the status of the Mandarin Chinese Language Immersion Magnet School.

Mr. McDonald informed the Commission that it will be relocating to the Galleria area after this semester. He added that HISD has been informed that a specific use permit must be obtained if they wish to continue using the property.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion: a motion was made by Commissioner Thorogood and seconded by Commissioner Simmons to adjourn the Regular Meeting.

Vote: the motion carried on a unanimous vote of 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 PM.