Spartanburg City Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
Thursday, October 15, 2020 @5:30 pm

Zoom Meeting Minutes

The City Planning Commission met via Zoom on Thursday, October 15, 2020, at 5:30pm. The following City Planning Commissioners attended this meeting: Jared Wilson, Howard Kinard, Warwick Spencer, Lekesa Whitter, Dr. R. Phillip Stone, and Reed Cunningham. Mike Epps was absent. Representing the Planning Department were Rachel Grothe, Planner II and Julie Roland, Administrative Assistant. Martin Livingston, Neighborhood Services Director was also present.

Roll Call

Mr. Wilson, the Chair, stated that notice of this meeting was posted and provided to the media 24 hours in advance as required by the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Wilson noted that six Planning Commissioners were present, with one absent, constituting a quorum; and he went over the rules and procedures for conducting a public hearing; and he had all of the present Planning Commissioners introduce themselves.

Dr. Stone moved approval of the Agenda for tonight’s meeting; and he was seconded by Mr. Cunningham. The motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Disposition of Minutes from the August 20, 2020 Meeting:

Dr. Stone moved approval as submitted of the August 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes; and he was seconded by Ms. Whitter. The motion was unanimously approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Old Business: None.

Petition for Extension at 110 Franklin Avenue – Owner/Applicant seeking an extension to the submission of the Final Development plan for the Preliminarily approved Apartment Development and City Council approved Annexation and Zone Designation request: (TMS#6-20-03-089.00 & 090.00); submitted by Abhinov Singh on behalf of Franklin Avenue Development, LLC, Owner.

Rachel Grothe was sworn, and she submitted the meeting packets the Board Members had previously received via email, tonight’s presentation and slides into evidence as Exhibit A. Ms. Grothe showed a map on the screen; and said the site is an approximately 17.26 acre vacant parcel located west of I-26, and it is bounded by US 19 to the South. It is adjacent to an established single-family neighborhood and a commercial shopping center, both of which are located outside city limits. So this is just sort of a bit of history and timeline and sort of background information. So the initial proposal was to annex the property into the city and give it a zone designation of R-6 PDD, so Planned Development District, with the intent of developing 288 residential units. So this timeline that y'all see here sort of outlines some key dates that the project went through, and what should have happened was, after the second reading at council, the project should have come back to Planning Commission for you all to approve the final development plan. So unfortunately this did not happen. So hence the request for extension. So that's why I'm here, and I think the developer is here, is just requesting that six month extension to bring the Final Development

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Plan in front of y'all for consideration. That's all I have in terms of my presentation. I can try to answer any questions that you all may have. I think the applicant should be here as well.

Planning Commission Questions:

Mr. Cunningham asked if the property was located behind Hobby Lobby.

Ms. Grothe affirmed.

Ms. Whitner said can I see the map again. I'm sorry, I wanted you to put it back up. I just really want to see that lot. That's behind Hobby Lobby.

Ms. Grothe affirmed. Ms. Grothe said I've had requests in the past... The Commissioners and whatnot like to see each other's faces. So there it is. It's sort of outlined in this blueish area up here.

Mr. Kinard said I see that the standard to grant the extension is with good cause. Can you just briefly go over the applicant's good cause that he's provided or reasons for the extension and why that should constitute good cause.

Ms. Grothe said I believe my understanding is that this site has gone through a couple of different owners, and I think the applicant could probably speak a little bit better to that. So my understanding is that it's changed hands a number of times since the original proposal, which I think made it pretty difficult for them to stick with a super defined schedule, because it's a fairly tight schedule. And then additionally, now we've had the pandemic, and so that's created a number of roadblocks. So that was the reasoning for their request.

Mr. Stone said I might make a slight amendment to the presentation. I think it's US 29, not US 19.

Ms. Grothe affirmed.

Mr. Wilson asked are there any more questions from the board for Staff before we ask if the applicant has anything to add.

Mr. Kinard asked if the city is not opposed to granting the extension from y'all's procedural standpoint,

Ms. Grothe said no, we are not at all. We're quite excited about the project.

Mr. Wilson said then at this time if the applicant does wish to add anything before we go into a board deliberation, we can unmute. I see a hand. The applicant raises his hand, I suppose.

Ms. Grothe said as far as I knew, I think Felix Engley, he's their engineer. I'm looking in the attendees to see if I see his name, but as far as I know, I think he was supposed to be here.

Mr. Wilson said and Rachel, just for the record, staff's recommendation is to approve the applicant's request for extension, per your report.

Ms. Grothe affirmed. Ms. Grothe said from my understanding, I think they're wanting to do a pretty quick turnaround. So the final plan should be in front of y'all, from what I understand, hopefully before the end of the year.

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Mr. Wilson said okay. All right, well, then I guess at this time I'll also open it up for any public questions or comments, if there are any, from any of the attendees. After hearing no comments from any of the attendees, Mr. Wilson closed the Public Hearing Portion of the meeting.

Planning Comments/Deliberations

Mr. Kinard said yes. Chairman, I wanted to say that it appears the applicant has met the standard of good cause shown to grant the extension, and I would recommend that the extension be granted.

Mr. Stone said and Mr. Chairman, I would agree with that considering how long we’ve kind of been back and forth on this. I think if we didn't grant it, then it might revert to a previous zoning, but it was unzoned because it wasn't in the city. I see a question that's popped up in the chat, "What incentive is the city offering on this project?" And to my knowledge, I don't think the city's offered any incentives on this project.

Mr. Wilson said not that I recall from the previous times it's come before the commission. Rachel, are you aware of any incentives that the city's providing for the project, if any at all.

Ms. Grothe said I am not aware of any that the city has provided.

Mr. Livingston said no, we're not aware of any that has been provided to this project at this time. I believe they are working on making a request, but any incentive that comes as a request typically is approved at the council meeting. So there's nothing approved at this time.

Mr. Cunningham said Mr. Chairman, I recall no discussion of any incentive in the original, rather lengthy review of this project.

Mr. Stone moved to approve the request. Mr. Cunningham seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Mr. Wilson the request for the extension to submit the Final Development Plan for preliminary review and approval is approved as submitted for tax map parcel 6-20-03-090.00 at 110 Franklin Avenue.

**Rezoning Request at Former Mary H. Wright School Site – Planned Development District**

*Rezoning request for TMS/#7-16-07-007.00 and 009.00 located at 201 Caulder Avenue, that is zoned General Institutional District (GID) and 261 Caulder Avenue, that is zoned R-6, General Residential to R-6 PDD for the development of Mary H. Wright Apartments; submitted by applicant John D. Montgomery on behalf of Cadles of West Virginia, Owner.*

Mr. Kinard recused himself from the discussion and voting on the basis that his firm regularly represents Montgomery Development Group, the applicant.

Mr. Livingston submitted the report into evidence as Exhibit A. Mr. Livingston said so the staff is requesting approval or will present for the Planning Commission review a rezoning request for the Mary H. site, which is 201 Caulder Avenue and 261 Caulder Avenue. We presented this same request or request
for rezoning at a community meeting sometime last week on Thursday, October 8th at the C.C. Woodson Community Center. So the rezoning process and steps: First we're going to have the Planning Commission presentation, and we're making this presentation so that the public is also aware of the required steps. The Planning Commission will hear the rezoning request tonight. If it's approved, it will go before City Council, the First Reading on Monday, November 9th at 5:30 PM. A public hearing will be held at that time as well. Then, it'll go before City Council for a Second Reading on Monday, November 23rd at 5:30 PM. The developer will also be required to return to the Planning Commission for a site plan review at a later time, and that will also require a staff review. For the public and for the Planning Commission information, this is just FYI, we also have a request for this site that's going before the Architectural Design and Historic Review Board. That meeting will take place on November 12th at 5:30 PM. So the Planning Commission analysis or required findings: The Planning Commission is required to review consistency, or lack thereof, with the comprehensive plan; required to review compatibility with the present zoning and conforming uses of nearby property, with the character of the neighborhood; the suitability of the property affected by the amendment for uses permitted by the district that would be made applicable to the proposed amendment; again, for marketability of the property affected by the amendment for uses permitted by the district applicable to the property at the time of the proposed amendment; and the availability of sewer water and storm water facilities generally suitable and adequate for the proposed use. For additional information for the Planning Commission, this property was originally zoned R-6. On August, 2008, the Planning Commission rezoned the property from R-6, from General Residential District, to GID, General Institutional District, for the Spartanburg Housing Authority, city and other services providers' offices. This property's federally designated historic. It's also on the South Carolina Department of Archives and History State Historic Preservation Office designation, and it's also being considered for a local historic designation. The R-6 PDD, our requested zoning, would allow for 160 residential units. Open space would also be required as part of the R-6 PDD requirement, and again, a site plan review and staff review. A site plan review by the Planning Commission, and a staff review I'm uninterested by. Here is the site located on Caulder Avenue. It is bounded by Caulder Avenue, South Liberty Street, and Caulder Circle. The site involves two parcels: 201 Caulder Avenue and 261 Caulder Avenue. Here's a view of the front of the building. It was a former school. Here's a view across the street, Tooe Hartwell Development. I believe it's called something else at this time. And this site is zoned R-6 across the street. This is the back of the building showing the old gym and the parking areas in the back of the building. It's a 20, 30 foot drop from the top parking space. This is on Caulder Circle, showing the buffer of trees and shrubs along the road. And this is the Northeast parking lot of the view of the building. So this is the site. It's currently zone GID, General Institutional District. Staff, the developer is requesting, or the applicant is requesting rezoning of this site from a GID and 261, which on this map is R-6. However, in 2008, this area 261 was required to be rezoned GID as well. The documentation that we have indicates that it should be GID, but right now, on all of our maps, it's listed as R-6. So staff is requesting that 261, whether it's R-6 or GID, be rezoned as part of this process to R-6 PDD, or the developers are requesting the rezoning to R-6 PDD. And this is a site plan of the site that was submitted by the applicant. The existing structure will remain and 53 units are proposed for the existing structure. From the community meeting that was held last week, an additional 76 units would be built on the rear of the building. 60 units would be built on the rear of the building and the applicant can provide some more information about whether that's phase one or phase two. And then, open space would be required in all areas around the building. And again, consistency or lack thereof with the comprehensive plan, the comprehensive plan has designated this site as institutional. The surrounding site, surrounding uses is
residential. The R6 PDD is suitable based on the comprehensive plan and the surrounding site uses. The marketability rezoning of the property to R6 PDD would allow the property to be marketed for residential uses compatible with the other surrounding uses as residential. And the availability of sewer, water, stormwater facilities generally suitable for proposed use. Based on this findings, staff concludes and recommends that the property located at 201 Calder Avenue, be rezoned from GID, General Institutional District. And 261 Calder Avenue be rezoned from R6 General or Residential District, and both properties be resolved to R6 PDD; with the intent to develop the site as residential housing development. And I'll answer any questions the Board may have.

Planning Commission Questions

Ms. Whitner asked Mr. Livingston, though phase one, are those going to be affordable units, market rate, or do we know.

Mr. Livingston said so the Planning Commission cannot consider the affordability of the development or the process, only Council can during any development for incentives. So, the developer has indicated there will be affordable, and can answer that question, but the Planning Commission cannot make any decision based on the affordability of units.

Mr. Wilson asked Mr. Livingston, so we have a total of 76 new units. Most of the 53, there'll be in phase one. So 129 total. And then, is it the parking, is it 98 spaces plus the 116 in phase one that show on the plan for a total of 214, if I'm reading that correctly.

Mr. Livingston said yes. 98 spaces plus 116. That's correct.

Ms. Whitner asked regarding traffic were there any concerns about congestion. Would it be right there at the elementary school and middle school.

Mr. Livingston said that's a good question. I don't know if there're any concerns about congestion. That's a question we can ask the developer and the applicant during the site review plan process that will come up as an issue. And the applicant is available to answer any questions as well.

Mr. Cunningham asked was the rezoning to the temporary or the current classification to permit the housing authority to occupy the property.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. Housing authority, the city, and there were other service providers.

Mr. Cunningham asked so the whole property was rezoned, not just, I guess the parcel had to be rezoned rather than stuck as unutilized.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. The entire property had to be rezoned.

Mr. Cunningham said he assumed they had vacated the property.

Mr. Livingston said the property has been vacant for the last four or five years.
Mr. Livingston said seemed as Dr. Stones as dropped off as well as had the Chairman.

Mr. Wilson the Chair was able to sign back on to the meeting at this time; and he said. I'm not sure what's going on. My computer just died; and he asked where they had left off.

Mr. Livingston said questions for the applicant.

Questions for the applicant.

Mr. Wilson asked is the applicant un-muted.

Mr. Livingston said yes.

Mr. Wilson asked are there any questions for the applicant from the Commission.

Ms. Whitner asked Mr. Montgomery would he be employing any Minority; or Black Owned businesses as sub-contractors or local talent to help with the development process.

Mr. John Montgomery said as I had stated at the community meeting last week, it is my intention to employ as many qualified minority owned businesses as possible for this project. I've worked with the city who has a list of minority-owned businesses. And my general contractor is working through that to request bids for as many trades as we can. So, it is certainly my intention to employ as many minority-owned businesses to help with the redevelopment of this property.

Mr. Wilson said I'm not sure if I missed any previous question for the applicant from the Board, but I wanted to make sure that everybody's still connected; and if we have any more questions for Mr. Montgomery from the Commission.

Mr. Cunningham asked Mr. Montgomery could he outline the time development phases of first phase, and when the second phase, if that comes to fruition, when that might occur.

Mr. Montgomery said so my plan is to begin construction on the first phase, which is the historic renovation of the former Mary H. Wright Elementary School sometime early next year. That will be 53 apartment units of which 20% plan on making affordable units. And these will be one and two bedroom apartments. The second phase, which Mr. Livingston has shown you is very preliminary. It's really very conceptual and a hundred percent depends on the success of the first phase. So if the first phase is successful and we were able to lease these apartments next, in the first year of operation, it would be my plan to begin a second phase that will a hundred percent depending on market conditions. But I would presume if I'm successful in finishing the development and the year of 2021, then hopefully start on a phase two, potentially in 2022 or 2023.

Dr. Stone was able to sign back on the meeting on to the meeting after temporarily losing his connection; and asked, I'm not sure if this match should go back more towards staff rather than Mr. Montgomery. But if we approve this, when the site review plan comes back, it's probably just going to be a site review then for the school itself and not for the additional buildings. Would that then mean it would come back
another time for the additional structures, or would we have possibility of approving everything when that
comes back at once.

Mr. Livingston said if it comes with just the original building, then you would approve that. The PDD
designation allows that if there are any changes to the original site plan that comes before the Board, then
any changes must come before the Board. So if there's a phase two that had to come before the Board for
approval as well.

Mr. Wilson asked were there any other questions from the Commission. There were no more questions at
this time. Mr. Wilson opened the public hearing proceedings for public comment/questions.

Ms. Tony Sutton said I know you said this is a preliminary plan; and she asked when they came back with
a final plan would that need to go before Council too.

Mr. Livingston said yes, that's a good question. I don't know if it has to go before council, since the site
plan review process would have to be approved by the Planning Commission. So Council would approve
the rezoning, but the Planning Commission would approve the site plan. So the site plan doesn't go back
before Council, after the Planning Commission reviews or the rezoning goes to Council.

Dr. Stone said he assumed if there were any incentive agreements, that Council would be the responsible
party for anything like that. So if anything like that came up in another phase, I presume that would go to
Council and certainly would not come to us.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. Any incentive goes to Council for approval review and approval.

Ms. Evelyn Blakely said she lived on the same side of the street as the Mary H. Wright School, about six
or seven blocks down; and said she would like to know where this marketing data came from. That says
that there are enough people to support this type of development, when you have quite a few vacancies
downtown, there are quite a few new developments that are coming on with the apartments and town
homes closer to the downtown area. So I just don't understand the marketing strategy that would support
this kind of development. That's question number one. And number two, given that this area is pretty
much decimated of the things that if I was renting an apartment there that I would want to see, I mean,
there are no good restaurants, there's no entertainment, we certainly don't have a grocery store, recreation
is minimal and after a point in time, you get tired of walking downtown or driving downtown. So I'm just
trying to figure the marketing strategy and how this is supposed to be a profitable project.

Mr. Wilson said thank you, Miss Blakely. We'll certainly allow the applicant to respond as best he can
and provide you a response or information that you might have on that. But as it relates to what the
Planning Commission can consider, as far as the project goes, it's not in our purview to weigh on market
data or whatever information from a supply and demand side for housing in the area that the developer or
applicant is considering as it relates to whether or not we recommend approval or not.

Ms. Blakely said okay. But would you recommend a project that's not going to be successful and maybe
doesn't live up to what it is that they're proposing to you.
Mr. Kenneth Myers of 299 South Converse Street; and said his question was regarding a phase two; regarding what's the number of housing units and the number of market housing and affordable houses.

Mr. Wilson said okay. Thank you, Mr. Myers, we will, once everyone's been allowed to ask their questions or make their comments, we will allow the applicant to come back on and respond to the questions that have been proposed. So as it relates to phase two, if they're going to be any of those units, the 76, that will be marketed at affordable rates or not.

Mr. Livingston said there is a question in the chat box regarding will the new building’s design have to compliment any of the historical design features of the existing school.

Mr. Wilson said I do not believe this would be anything that was under the Planning Commission’s purview; but he believed it probably needed to go in front of the City’s Historical Board.

Mr. Livingston said that is correct. The Planning Commission cannot consider the design, the Planning Commission is looking at reexamining land use, and site plan. The Architectural Design and Historic Review Board will be reviewing the design of the structure design and exterior materials.

Mr. Wilson said thank you for clarifying that for us.

Dr. Stone said it might actually be that the HARB might be able to require that the exterior buildings be in conformity, but I don't know that, but it may be under their purview.

Mr. Livingston affirmed.

Mr. Wilson asked were there any other public comments or questions. There were no more public comment.

Mr. Livingston said I don't see any more. Are there any more persons that would like to speak, can use the hand or chat function?

Ms. Whitner asked Mr. Livingston just to confirm; that they could only discuss the land use and the site plans, what you share with us, is that correct.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. The affordability of the units, the historic character of the units, those fall under other categories. The affordability would be approved by Council with a development agreement and incentives via the historic would be reviewed by the HARB Board.

Mr. Whitner asked could she just see the map one more time regarding where they're planning on developing first phase. Will phase one actually be the actual school, and then what you showed us was phase two, was that correct.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. Phase one based on the community meetings last week. And the discussions tonight would be the existing structure would be phase one.
Mr. Wilson closed the public hearing portion of the meeting.

Mr. Montgomery said I'll be happy to make a couple comments regarding the questions that were asked is it relates to the market analysis. I did perform an independent analysis from a third party that looked at the vacancy rates of the immediate area, as well as the city of Spartanburg. And he came, they came back with a recommendation that there was sufficient demand in the markets based on the high occupancy that currently exists with the apartments in and around the city of Spartanburg. And they also recommended rents that I should consider for my underwriting. And it was with those assumptions and my budget that I've been working with my contractor on that led me to decide to move forward with the project. So it is certainly my hope that it will be successful and we can take a historically significant building in Spartanburg and preserve it. As Mr. Livingston mentioned, the building has been sitting vacant for five years and it is starting to show signs of deterioration. And so I'm hopeful that this will be approved as well as other public meetings so that we can begin the restoration of this historic building, as it relates to the affordability for a phase two that has not been determined, it would be my intention to provide as many affordable units as I can with a minimum of 20% of the units being affordable. But that will a hundred percent be determined on thee, the success of the first phase is you might be aware of renovating and restoring historic buildings are very expensive, so the use of historic tax credits are vital and helping fund the construction costs. And then as it relates to the design of phase two, that has not, I haven't even began to consider the design for the phase two buildings, but it certainly will be my intent to make them like I'm doing in the North side with the affordable units, I'm building there to be of good quality design and construction materials. That would be in keeping with the look of the development of phase one. So we'll be discussing that at a feature in a future meeting when I have a set of designs plans that I can share.

Mr. Wilson said thank you Mr. Montgomery. All right. We will now proceed to Board deliberation.

Planning Commission Deliberation:

Mr. Cunningham said it sounded like a very positive project to retain and restore the historic site. And it sounds like it's being the proposal is within the confines of the requirement. Are there other reviews to be held, but it sounds like a very positive move and injection of capital in that area. So I'm very positive on it.

Mr. Wilson said I would agree. I mean, taking the existing structure and repurposing it for a better use as well as providing housing. And the information that's been shared with us seems to be taking this property in a direction that will benefit the neighborhood and the surrounding area, so I am in favor.

Dr. Stone agreed with the other points that have been made thus far, it meets a lot of my basic criteria for these projects. It adds housing to the city. It's actually adding some affordable housing to the city, and some taxable wealth. It's taking a piece of property that is currently under-utilized, and for whom I don't think anybody has been able to come up with a future for, from what I understand, it has the support of the South side community, I've tried to have a few conversations about it. I did get an email from one of my neighbors who was opposed, and I got the email too late to forward it on to everyone else. But generally I haven't had any other cause about it that led me to have any heartburn over this I intend to support it.
Mr. Wilson said he applauded the city and the applicant for doing what they did to engage the community with the public meeting they held previously to inform the public; and he asked if the City or Planning Department had received any communications about this from community members.

Mr. Livingston said I haven't received any communications other than the community meeting only to request the link regarding the meeting. There were several that asked to attend the meeting tonight and there are there actually on the meeting as part of the attendees.

Mr. Wilson said well, hopefully as it's pretty common with these things and to one of the comments about there being a lack of offerings and services and amenities in the surrounding area or project like this certainly has the potential to encourage additional development in the area.

Mr. Wilson motioned to approve the request; and he was seconded by Dr. Stone. The motion as approved by a vote of 5 to 0 to 1, with Mr. Kinard being recused from this item of business.

Mr. Wilson said let the record reflect that the rezoning request at the former Mary H. Wright school site, TMS 7-16-07-007.00 and 009.00 located at 201 Caulder Avenue and 261 Caulder Avenue is recommended for approval as submitted. The request will be heard on Monday, November 9, 2020 by Council for another public hearing and First Reading; and if it is approved on First Reading, it would go for a Second/Final Reading on November 23, 2020.

All right. The next item on the agenda, the request for recommendation to city council of the city of Spartanburg neighborhood services department and their Highland master plan be added to the comprehensive plan. If staff will please submit.

Request for Recommendation to City Council – The City of Spartanburg Neighborhood Services Department is requesting that the Planning Commission recommend to City Council that the Highland Master Plan be added to the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Livingston submitted the presentation and slides into evidence as Exhibit A.

Mr. Livingston said we have a presentation by three planners, A.P.D Urban Planning and Management that will present the plan before the planning commission and for the public information, and I'd like to introduce Jesse Wiles. Jesse is the principal of A.P.D Urban Planning and Management, the urban planning, and A.P.D they'll tell you or who they are and what they do, but they were selected from a round of nine architecture and design firms. And the neighborhood was part of that selection process back in 2019. And so I think started in 2018 and went into 2019. It was a very rigorous process in which the neighborhood actually included questions for the selection of the architect and designers, so I'll ask Jesse, Mr. Wiles to share either his screen or presentation or answer any questions regarding the plan.

Mr. Jesse Wiles said good evening everyone, Martin, I'm not sure if you if you want to hear any portion of the plan as I talk through it, we actually completed two documents for the city. You know, one being the entire plan report, which was about 144 pages, and then we created a summary of the plan itself, which about which is about 34 pages. And it's actually [inaudible 00:57:03] the summary that you know,
that Martin and I will be reviewing rather quickly this evening. So I don't know if you wanted to share that on a screen or just have me talk through it.

Mr. Livingston said I'll pull up the summary.

Mr. Wiles said well, if everyone else, if everyone else can see it, that's why. Cause I, I actually have it in front of me and so what I wanted to do, Martin, I'm just going to kind of go through, kind of paraphrase. What's on a table of content and you can feel free to scroll through these elements as we talk about it, if that's okay Yeah. So just want to introduce myself. My name is Jesse Wiles. I am the president and owner of A.P.D, Urban Planning and Management. Our firm was actually started around 1980 and our initial services involved, acquiring and developing properties and historic community. We actually started our firm in Savannah, Georgia. We're now based in Atlanta and probably about maybe 25 years ago or so we moved away from the providing real estate development services and concentrated almost exclusively on working with municipalities and specifically in neighborhoods that that had very similar demographics as the Highland neighborhood, community and Spartanburg in developing plans to help municipalities and neighborhoods kind of figure out how do we develop our communities? How do we transform our communities similar to the approach that we've taken to Highland? So this process is, as Martin mentioned, was, was very involved. We worked in the community probably over a year and our initial approach to any assignment, including the one that we worked in Highland is to really learn about the neighborhood, to understand who lives there, what some of the challenges are, what some of the opportunities are. And we developed what we call it a neighborhood profile and a profile of his existing conditions. One of the things that among a lot of information that we learned about the Highland neighborhood is that it had a rich cultural and historic experience that we wanted to make sure served as kind of a thread, if you will, through any recommendations that we might make to the city and to the community about how the neighborhood would be transformed. And contrary to what we see in a lot of neighborhoods, Highland is a very stable neighborhood. It really doesn't have what we would consider a lot of light, nor does it, have a lot of vacant and abandoned property? And I think to its advantage, it has a significant amount of, of vacant land, primarily in the Cammie Claggett site that are highly concentrated toward the interest in the gateway or the Highland neighborhood that really will serve itself well, as it moves into the implementation phase of some of the recommendations that we have made. And so, one of the methodologies that we use to kind of hear what the community had to say about itself and kind of establish what the community thought was a vision for how this neighborhood with transformed was community meetings. So we had an opportunity to do two in-person community meetings. The first one attracted over 200 participants. The second one was a little smaller, but still had a pen, a very good turnout. And then of course, we were faced with the pandemic and conducted several virtual meetings following that, we also established a steering committee that consisted of the representation from the community representation from the city, a number of key, I would call them players or our community participants, including some of the foundations, some of the industry representatives in the area that provided a lot of significant insight in terms of their perception of how a transformed Highland community could impact a greater Spartanburg city as a whole. And then this numerous stakeholder engagements, and these are basically one-on-one meetings with community leaders inside and out of the Highland neighborhood. So we felt like we really did a fairly comprehensive approach to soliciting community input. The next element of the project was really understanding the market. And so we took a look at both thee who would be basically just to kind of the supply and demand. I heard that question
answered earlier about a specific project, but we also took that approach about what is the potential market for attracting people into the Highland neighborhood? What are some of the economic development challenges that the residents who live in the Highland neighborhood or what potentially will, would live in the Highland neighborhood? What would they be faced with? What’s the market realities of transforming the Highland neighborhood, especially as it relates to attracting new people into the neighborhood and being able to market the neighborhood for residential and potential neighborhood retail types of development. And then we sit with that information kind of in hand and understanding it. We begin to develop the strategy associated with the transformation of the neighborhood. And essentially if you've had a chance to take a look at the report or take a look at it, sometime in the future, this neighborhood transformation of the Highland neighborhood is broken down into two distinct components. The first component was how do as a part of this transformation, how do we retain existing residents who currently live in the community? So what's the community retention strategy that would need to be put in place and implemented as a way of ensuring that the net result of transforming the Highland neighborhood doesn't mean that the gentrification of residents who live in the community now. And so that is a very important part of the way we operate as a planning firm, because we work in a lot of the communities who have tremendous potential like the Highland neighborhood, because of his proximity to downtown the redevelopment potential of the neighborhood with large tracks of undeveloped property and, and the potential for redeveloping, these neighborhoods at the expense of legacy residents is significant. And so we really put a lot of time and effort into developing strategies that are designed to minimize adverse impact to existing residents as part of our urban planning processes. The other distinct element of our neighborhood transformation is the Highland neighborhood. Like a lot of the neighborhoods that we work in as a fairly significant concentration of property and lower income residents, whether they're renters or homeowners, that is not a recipe for neighborhood transformation. So you want to be able to attract new people in new households, into the neighborhood, as I mentioned without, but without the expense of, of gentrifying existing residents. And so there's a significant component of the neighborhood transformation is not only how to attract new residents, but where these catalytic projects would occur, how would they be re-phased in potentially even what they might cost? So the, as, as part of that process, we identified five catalytic projects within the Highland neighborhood and a phasing of those projects. And then for each one of the catalytic projects, we developed a kind of a high level development pro forma, if you will, that could be used by the city, by the neighborhood residents, in terms of being able to say, this is what these projects potential potentially would cost. This would, this is a program of the strategy in terms of the types of how many residential units it could be developed, what is the potential for some retail to come into the community and what would this cost? And if there is a development gap, what would that development gap look like and potentially how it could even be funded? And then the final section of the plan is basically our implementation section. And as we've had in our discussion with Martin and with the community and other members of the city, we place a lot of emphasis on the implementation of our recommendations. So, we pride ourselves in a comprehensive plan, but we also pride ourselves and suggesting how these recommendations could actually be implemented. And so we basically construct our implementation strategy into five sections where redevelopment could occur. You what does the overall master plan of this neighborhood looked like in terms of how it would be built out? Who would actually sit on top of executing the recommendations, basically how a community quarterback type of concept could be constructed, what would be the potential development process and how would it, what would the funding structure look like? And then roles and responsibilities of who would take charge and who might be, who should the community and the city look
at to take responsibility for developing different aspects of the redevelopment process itself. And so that's just a real quick overview of the planning process that we followed, how we kind of gained knowledge and understanding of the neighborhood who lived there, how we solicited input. Some of the methodologies that we use to get a market reality or a reality check on how this neighborhood might be transformed. What would be the supply, what would be the demand associated with it, or how much supply if you would, and how would that be phased in over time. And then, looking at ways in which this transformation could take place, both from the perspective of existing residents, as well as residents who would be new families who would be attracted to the neighborhood. And then, how this implementation would potentially take place. And we may Martin, have some of the Highland neighborhood residents as part of the meeting this evening. I don't know if they would want to add anything, but I believe at least Mr. Jeter, and maybe some others are in attendance.

Mr. Livingston said Mr. Jeter and Wilma Moore can speak.

Mr. Jeter said okay. Leroy Jeter, the President of the Highland Neighborhood Association. We've been pleased with the APD and their success in drawing up the master plan.

Mr. Livingston said we also have Mr. Leon Wiles as well, from the neighborhood.

Mr. Leon Wiles said good evening. This is Leon Wiles. It's been mentioned earlier, there have been a series of meetings that have involved community residents and other stakeholders involved in the redevelopment and enhancement of the Highland neighborhood. And we've been really pleased with the process, because it's given a great deal of opportunity for input from residents and from other others associated with the neighborhood. And so, we feel that much of the plan reflects some of the opinions and recommendations, and some of the concerns of the neighborhood. And we think it's been well-constructed in terms of laying out a comprehensive plan that has real possibilities of being implemented over time.

Mr. Wilson said thank you. Mr. Wiles.

Ms. Wilma Moore said we went through a very vigorous process in trying to select someone that would pay attention to everything we wanted in the neighborhood and we decided upon Mr. Wiles and APD. They've done a phenomenal job in picking up on all the little details, all the little nuances that they heard from the neighborhood. So, I think they did a phenomenal job in creating the master plan for us.

Mr. Wilson said it's good to hear. Thank you, Ms. Moore. Martin, do we have any others?

Mr. Livingston said I do not have any other raised hands or anyone using the chat function Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wilson said Martin, does city staff have anything they want to add to the presentation that we just received from APD.

Mr. Livingston said Mr. Chairman, the presentation was funded by many partners. We had many in the community other than the city to fund this planning effort. And there are several of the partners on the line, Spartanburg County Foundation, Mary Black Foundation. And I'm trying not to miss anyone. We also had the United Way that assisted with the funding this plan, as well as Spartanburg School District 7,
and Spartanburg Housing Authority, and the JM Smith Foundation. They all contributed to the funding of the plan to bring APD to implement this plan. And this plan is unique in that it also includes a section on COVID-19 and how it affects redevelopment and how it would re-affect redevelopment moving forward. So, that is probably one of the first times that a COVID-19 or infection disease response is included in a neighborhood planning process. So, we thank APD for their ingenuity, and the uniqueness of their process. And for making sure that they were able to capture the neighborhood's wishes and dreams for the community.

Mr. Wilson said thank you, sir. All right. Well, at this time I will open up for more questions from the Commission to either city staff or APD.

Ms. Moore said Mr. Chairman, I have a question for Martin and I don't know if he can answer this. Martin, do you know if the families that are being relocated, do they have first rights back to Highland once it's been redeveloped. And then my second question is, will Highland still have its designation as an Opportunity Zone once this redevelopment has been completed.

Mr. Livingston said so, the Opportunity Zone designation is not something that changes, that was designated by the Governor of South Carolina. And so, that designation will remain as long as Opportunity Zones are in existence, or unless they change the rules. As far as residents are relocated back to Highland, that's one of the unique process of this Highland Master Plan. And Mr. Wiles can probably provide more information about that, is there's actually a resident retention process included in the Transformation Plan process. And a majority of the development areas will not include relocation of residents. A majority of the development areas are vacant land that will be developed. The only one so far who that affects is North Ridge, and there's a plan to move residents to actually new development in North Ridge. And there's a recommendation that those residents, if they want to move back to Highland be considered as well. And I think that process is ongoing and we're working with the United Way. The city is working with United Way on the North Ridge development. Mr. Wiles, do you have anything to add on the retention.

Mr. Wiles said yeah, I think you captured a lot of that Martin. I probably spent in that short overview probably more time on community retention than any other section, because it really wasn't something quite honestly, that we always placed as much emphasis as we place now on our urban planning work. And so, probably about 10 years ago, what we recognized was that we had all of these really cool strategies associated with bringing people back into the neighborhoods, because most of our work product is around neighborhoods that have close proximity to the center of a city. And so, if you allow the urban planning trends that are going on now and you're ... I mean, you're really exemplifying this type of work in Spartanburg, is that you're attracting people back into town. And then subsequently, back into neighborhoods who are close to the downtown area. And what we were noticing in our work was that, while our strategies were actually being implemented and good work was happening, it was happening at the expense of residents who lived close to town or close to center town neighborhoods. And so, what you see in the Highland Transformation Plan is a particular attention placed on very intentional strategies relative to reinvesting in the existing housing stock. And reinvesting in it in such a way where existing residents can still afford to either rent or own the property, executing or suggesting partnerships that can happen with the school districts, the schools that serve the neighborhoods in which we're working in.
Paying attention to things like neighborhood daycare, code enforcement, and environmental design, which now plays into this whole notion of how does COVID-19 impact neighborhoods that are at-risk. But, trying to associate specific strategies around key elements of some of the areas that I just described really, play into how existing residents can stay in a neighborhood and not be adversely impacted by the fact that their neighborhood is now attractive to people who want to live in and closer to town. And, one of the key elements that the Highland neighborhood has and I think could really make these strategies work is the fact that they have large tracks of land that can be developed. And attract new people in the neighborhood while retention strategies are being executed. That is very unique in our experience. And so, a lot of what ... And when we looked at the phasing of how new development could take place in Highland, it was really built around the vacant land tracks and not around the existing areas of the community that are currently occupied.

Ms. Moore said thank you, Mr. Wiles, Mr. Chairman, I want to just say, thank you. You have three matriots, Mr. Leroy, Ms. Wilma, and Mr. Leon, all from Highland. I'm too from Highland, and so it plays a near and dear part in my heart to know that everyone gets the fair opportunity. So, thank you all so much for making this a priority for the families there. And Wilma, we love your work, and Mr. Leroy, we love you guys. Thank you.

Dr. Stone said he read through a good bit of this plan today; and thought it was just really comprehensive. It has some things for us to look at for the Planning Commission to do. I noticed some things that I think fit in with the comp plan that look for some future rezonings. But, I just think the neighborhood and the city have done this right. There looks like there was a lot of community involvement. And I think this is a model for other neighborhoods to follow in any other parts of the city that are in need of a transformation. I think they've done a good job with this. And I appreciate Mr. Jeter especially in the leadership he provides for that neighborhood.

Mr. Wilson affirmed. Okay. Any other questions from the Commission for city staff, or for APD.

Ms. Moore said just one last comment. I really do believe they had equity as the forefront when it came to looking at this plan, so thank you all for contributing.

Mr. Wilson asked just to make sure before we vote on this, are we voting on two things. One, the Commission's review and approval of the Transformation Plan itself. And then two, that the Transformation Plan be added to the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Livingston affirmed.

Dr. Stone moved approval of the request as submitted, and approval of the Highland Neighborhood Transformation Plan; and secondly that the Highland Neighborhood Transformation Plan be added to the new Comprehensive Plan; and he was seconded by Mr. Wilson. The motion was unanimously approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Mr. Wilson said for the record, the Commission recommends for approval the request as submitted for the review and approval of the Highland Neighborhood Transformation Plan, and second, for the Highland...
Neighborhood Transformation Plan to be added to the comprehensive plan. He asked Mr. Livingston will this be going to Council on November 9th.

Mr. Livingston said we are requesting that actually go before Council on November 23rd. We'd like to have another community meeting in between the Planning Commission approval for the community to review the plan again.

Mr. Wilson said 23rd, okay.

**Site and Landscape Plans Approved (information purposes only) since the August 20, 2020 Meeting.**

Northside Townhomes- Milan/Raindrop/Howard St bounded block

Robert Smalls Apartments – 561 Wofford St.

Beaumont Park Trail – City/County Project with Partners for Active Living

The Ellington Apartments – 548 and 560 Magnolia St.

**City Council Updates (FYI) Since Last Mtg. of Planning Commission on August 20, 2020:**

Mr. Livingston went over the updates since the last Planning Commission Meeting that were listed on tonight’s agenda.

**Staff Announcements**

Mr. Livingston said the Comp Plan is continuing; and he presented an update as follows: The On the Table discussion is on PlanSpartanburg.com and available for anyone to schedule an On the Table discussion regarding any topic of interest to the group, to individual groups. We have done several so far in the community where staff attended. And we can attend any community meeting or any other, let's say, if someone's interested in having a planner at a On the Table discussion, we can do that as well.

We've also prepared a vision packet for anyone in the public that's interested in providing input on what the vision of Spartanburg should be. That packet is also available on PlanSpartanburg.com, where we'll be providing that packet and food boxes beginning this week. But, we'll also have those available at the city at 440 South Church Street available for anyone that may have an interest in completing and submitting one of those packets. It includes an opportunity for children to be involved and draw on the hand what you would like to see in Spartanburg, what you would like to see the future of Spartanburg to be, and submit that as well.

And then finally, the weekend of October 22nd, beginning that Thursday will be Plan-A-Palooza. And we'll allow the in-person and virtual conversations about the comprehensive plan, the TPU DC, the planners that are developing, the consultants that are developing the comprehensive plan will provide an opportunity for the general public to just visit on any particular topic of interest to the community. And
we could send you information on the Plan-A-Palooza or any of those items by email of the board if the Commission is interested in learning more about it.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:01 pm.

Jared Wilson, Chair

Minutes edited by Julie Roland, Administrative Assistant