

Spartanburg City Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 18, 2021 @ 5:30pm

Zoom Meeting Minutes

The City Planning Commission met via Zoom on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 5:30pm. The following City Planning Commissioners attended this meeting: Jared Wilson, Howard Kinard, Dr. Phillip Stone, Lekesa Whitner, Warwick Spencer, and Reed Cunningham. Absent was Mike Epps. Representing the Planning Department were Martin Livingston, Community Development Director and Emily Thomas, Planner I. Also present was Craig Lewis, Stantec Design Consultant.

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.

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 February 18, 2021 Meeting:

Dr. Stone moved approval as submitted of the February 18, 2021 Meeting Minutes; and he was seconded by Ms. Whitner. The motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Old Business: None

The Planning Department has received a request to consider approval of a Text Amendment to the Downtown Code to include storage facilities in the use table and in the DT-4, DT-5, and DT-6 Districts

Mr. Livingston said Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board, Staff, is requesting a proposed edit to the Urban Code in order to facilitate the use of self-storage facilities in and around downtown area that support the increasing residential nature of this district, considering the smaller footprints of housing units in this area and relative lack of storage, in comparison to larger housing units found elsewhere in the City. Currently self-storage facilities of any kind are prohibited within the DT Urban Code zones. After reviewing and consulting with Craig Lewis, Lead Architect for Stantec Urban Places Group and City of Spartanburg Urban Design Consultant, that proposed the following change to the table of approved uses with the Urban Code, including detailed design review and supplemental use requirements. And I'll share my screen or see what I'm reviewing as well. So, the table is requesting Storage-Warehouses, indoor storage. Here it's recommended in the DT-4 and DT-5 districts, not in DT3, which is primarily residential. And DT-6, not in DT-6, which is primarily the downtown core. Part of the process includes permitted subject to supplemental use standards. That means that under self-storage, indoor storage would require a presentation to the Design Review Board. It would be permitted in existing non-residential buildings in the Northside only, so only existing buildings. Enclosed storage shall be located within the building and outside storage of any type, including moving vans, trailers, vehicles and boats is prohibited except in the rear yard, fully screened from view. And then Active Ground Floor Uses Required: Maximum 50% of this space may be occupied by the rental and management office. Access to individual units must be through the internal hallway's. Compliance with Design Requirements: Compliance with the provisions of Section 515.6 is required. Section 515.6 is the Building Standards. One of the building standards is what the frontage looks like, what signs look like and any mechanical must be in the roof or screened on the rear. At its February 18, 2021 meeting the Design Review Board made some minor changes to the

original request. Staff recommends approval of the above detailed text amendment as proposed. If approved by the Planning Commission, this item will be presented to City Council for review and approval at its first reading on April 12th and Second Reading on April 26th. And so, one of the requests for the Planning Commission was to take a look at where the storage facilities are located. Right here in the center, is a downtown area and about a mile out, there are storage units and another mile and a half, two miles to the North there are storage units. Let me make this a little smaller. And so there are storage units on the outer boundaries of the City limits. So, all these blue dots are storage facilities, self-storage facilities. The majority of these are located outside the City limits. And these are inside the City lines. And then, we asked Stantec to provide us with locations of designs of buildings and what indoor storage would look like. This is in downtown Charlotte. This is near the Panther Stadium. And you see the ground floor retail and then it looks like an office building or an apartment building. Here's another example on a corridor in Charlotte. Looks like office building on the ground floor. And then windows look like office building or apartment units. And Staff recommends approval and I'll answer any questions the Planning Commission may have.

Mr. Wilson said Thank you, Mr. Livingston. I'll open up for Board questions at this time.

Planning Commission Questions:

Ms. Whitner recused herself from voting on the proposal due to her employment in the Northside Development.

Mr. Kinard said Martin, if you could just differentiate the points. I know we discussed this use table at the last meeting. Can you tell us what has been revised since that last meeting, as opposed to this new request.

Mr. Livingston said sure. If you go back to the use table and the supplemental requirements. In the original request, DT-6 was included in the request for the storage areas. I think the Planning Commission, as well as the Design Review Board had some concerns about DT-6, so that was removed. And then the other item that was added was item number two, under their permitted subject to supplemental use standards. Permitted an existing nonresidential building in the Northside only. And one of the points that was brought up by the Design Review Board was concerned for existing buildings being converted to commercial, when the need was more for residential. So it doesn't allow for new buildings storage. It only allows for existing buildings to be converted. So those are the two major changes that were made. All the other items remained the same. And then we added a map of the storage facilities around the City so that the Planning Commission can be aware of where those were located. And then we added some examples of new buildings that are constructed. A few of the new buildings we included as an example for how new buildings would look as storage facilities. And those were the two major changes.

Mr. Kinard said okay, great. Thank you for that clarification.

Dr. Stone said I have a question and I guess this is going to be hard to answer since the City Attorney isn't here; but how can we legally differentiate what the Northside is. If we're putting that in, that phrase non-residential in the Northside only, does the Northside have a legal definition that we could hang on.

Mr. Livingston said yes, I believe it was in 2014. The Northside Master Plan includes the boundaries and the Northside Master Plan was approved by the Planning Commission as well as City Council. And so it has a clearly defined boundary of where the Northside is in that Comprehensive Neighborhood, Northside Initiative Plan.

Mr. Spencer asked was there actually a vote of the Design Review Board on this matter or did they just offer commentary and thoughts and insights. It was kind of difficult to tell from the minutes.

Mr. Livingston said no, there was no vote. This was not a voted item. The item must be voted on by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Spencer said in the photographs, some were uses, similar proposed uses, I guess both were from Charlotte or at least one was from Charlotte. Both appear to be new buildings, new construction.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. They're both new construction.

Mr. Kinard said and Martin, to clarify a bit, the way that it's written out, new construction is not allowed. Is that correct. Because it's only for existing buildings.

Mr. Livingston said that's correct. It's only for existing buildings.

Mr. Kinard said okay.

Mr. Wilson said to support, perhaps a better example of a conversion that we have in town would be one I want to show up the map as you're headed out to Westgate Mall, before it was the storage, it was converted to a hardware store.

Mr. Livingston said right.

Mr. Wilson said right. So, that's now been converted into interior self-storage, which I think that could be a similar type application to some of the buildings that would fall under this area.

Mr. Cunningham said and the reason for the interest in the change was, was there a groundswell of interest in this or was this...what exactly was the driving force behind the desire for the change.

Mr. Livingston said there was one request for an existing building to be converted to storage. It did not fit in any of the DT zone requirements to have storage. As a matter of fact, storage is not allowed in any of the DT zones. And so we received a request to change the zoning. To get a special use or some type of use. The only way for that facility to be converted to storage was through a text amendment and revision to the design review, the DT code requirements. So we received one request. That's part of the reason why we're here today.

Mr. Cunningham said thank you.

Dr. Stone said we need to get public comment.

Mr. Wilson said yes. Before we open up for any public questions or comments, any other questions from the commission of staff. No, I'll pause for five seconds. All right. Hearing none. I'll now open up the proceedings for any public questions or comments related to this item.

Mr. Livingston said hold on. We have Ms. Sherry Barrett, would like to speak.

Ms. Sherry Barrett said I'm with Upstate Forever. I just had a question of clarification. So are these only to be permitted in the Northside. They can't be anywhere else in those transect zones.

Mr. Livingston said in the DT zones.

Ms. Barrett said so they're only permitted in the Northside or anywhere in the DT zones but only in existing retrofits in the Northside. That's my confusion.

Mr. Wilson said only in the DT-4 and DT-5 areas of the Northside in existing non-residential buildings.

Ms. Barrett said okay. So it's only in the Northside, nowhere else. Are those the only zones in the City that are in the Northside that are DT or 3 and 4, excuse me, 4 and 5.

Dr. Stone said I think there's some DT-3's on the Northside as well.

Ms. Barrett said but no DT-4, I guess, there's no other zones. That it's only in the Northside, is where these zones are, where you're allowing them. So if in the future, you added another area of the City that was zone D4 or 5, would these be allowed.

Mr. Wilson said under this text amendment change, if approved, they would not be allowed outside of the Northside boundary, regardless of DT-4 or DT-5.

Ms. Barrett said I don't know, this to me, just smacks of your writing a text amendment explicitly to allow one proposal. And it I know it doesn't make any difference now because there aren't any of these zones outside of that area but for the future, it seems like it should be written with some foresight. That's just my comment.

Mr. Wilson said thank you very much.

Mr. Livingston said we have also Pastor Mark Everett.

Mr. Mark Everett said okay. Should this be allowed in existing buildings that have their mechanical HVAC units currently located on the sides of the building; does that mean that they would have to be relocated to accommodate this.

Mr. Livingston said yes, they would. And that's a general DT requirement for all DT zones. There are no raised hands or comments in the chat, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Wilson said okay. I'll give you another second and then close the public portion. All right. Well, at this time I'll close the public portion of the proceedings and open it up for any commissioner questions to staff, before we proceed to Board deliberation. Mr. Lewis, maybe for clarity, it could have gotten confused in some of the questions that were being asked. There are in fact DT-4 and DT-5 zone areas in downtown, they're outside of the Northside, correct.

Mr. Lewis said that is correct. The DT-6 zone comprises the downtown area. There is, in the downtown area DT-4, DT-5 and DT-6.

Mr. Wilson said it might've just been me that I felt like that might've gotten confused and some of the back and forth in the public comment there.

Mr. Lewis said yes. The Northside elected to expand the DT zones beyond downtown into their neighborhood, using the Northside Initiative Plan. It was adopted by the Planning Commission and the City Council. So Northside has DT-5, DT-4 and DT-3 zones in their neighborhood. There are no DT-6 in the Northside.

Mr. Wilson said thank you, sir. All right. Any other questions for staff from the commission before we do a deliberation. All right. Hearing none. Then we will do just that, we will proceed to a Board Deliberation.

Planning Commission Deliberation:

Mr. Wilson said I'll start. I do feel like from the input of the Design Review Board and also the staff recommended changes that certainly have come back and addressed some of our initial concerns and questions from the previous meeting, where the request was made. I know one of them was specifically related to not being comfortable, allowing it in the DT-6 district. So that's obviously been removed and I do think that limiting it to existing non-residential buildings is a positive move. So that you just see buildings that are, that could be repurposed for residential would not be able to fall into this since there is such a need for residential units in the area. So, I do think that the request is certainly recruited since we heard that last month, that break the ice.

Mr. Kinard said I tend agree with that, based on the revisions that were made as opposed to the prior presentation. And also these... So the middle use standards that have been added in are required going forward.

Dr. Stone said I think it's a better proposal than it was and if it becomes policy, I can live with it, but I'm still not persuaded. I do feel like we are writing a City Ordinance, a general City Ordinance for one specific purpose; and I'm not sure that's a great idea. And I still contend that I'm not sure that self-storage units are the best and highest use for things that we've identified as being in our downtown code. So, that's kind of where I am.

Mr. Spencer said I share Phillip's skepticism. And reading the notes from the Design Review Board meeting; I sense skepticism on their part. There's no question, it's a better proposal now than it was when we previously visited it. But the idea of having vehicles and boats and other, such things, even if they're shielded from views, forwarded down in these downtown areas. I'm skeptical.

Dr. Stone said I would agree. I mean, I'm my reading of the DRBs notes. I didn't get the sense that they were thrilled about this, honestly.

Mr. Cunningham said I think it's a positive move because I don't see it as necessarily a permanent use of the property. Especially since it's been limited to existing buildings. I think it may be a stair-step in the Northside to improving the surrounding area. And as the community grows, maybe the buildings will be repurposed. I think, had it been formatted to include new buildings. I think that would have changed my opinion but I'm for this adjustment. I think it's a positive step and I don't see it as necessarily permanent.

Dr. Stone said I would also still be and I'd also add, I didn't get a great sense that there was a lot of support among Northside residents for it, either from what we heard of a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Kinard said Phil, what do you mean; the last meeting.

Dr. Stone said our last meeting, right.

Mr. Cunningham said I recall one person who was vocal but I didn't hear a number of things.

Mr. Kinard moved for approval of the text amendment and was seconded by Mr. Cunningham. The motion carried by a vote of 3-2, with Mr. Spencer and Dr. Stone in opposition and Ms. Whitner recused.

Mr. Wilson said so for the record, the request as submitted by staff to consider approval of the text amendment to the downtown code, to include a storage facilities in the use table and in the DT-4 and 5 districts only, of the Northside in existing non-residential buildings, and per the Design Standards is recommended for approval as submitted. All right. We have no further new business before us. There is site and landscape plans approved since our previous meeting or none. Mr. Livingston, would you like to speak just to the two City Council updates since February 18th.

City Council Updates Since Last Mtg. of Planning Commission

Mr. Livingston said yes, Mr. Chairman, there are two updates. At second reading on February 22nd, was the 153 Oakwood Avenue rezoning from GID to R6/PDD. That was approved by Council at Second Reading. And then on February 22nd, a Resolution to approve addition of 201 Caulder Avenue, the former Mary H. Wright School to the Spartanburg Register of Historic Places that was also approved at the Council meeting, that the Planning Commission meeting you're aware of.

Mr. Wilson said thank you, sir. And, it does not appear there's any specific staff announcements other than the general ones. Any specific updates on the comprehensive planning process that we need to share.

Mr. Livingston said we're waiting for a client draft review of the Comprehensive Plan for internal staff review. And we've also started an arts contest that we're submitting online and throughout the City, for anyone that's interested in showing their art skills as part of the Comprehensive Planning process. And they'll be prizes for those art contests. And we send it out to the general public and to the entire community.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.



Jared Wilson, Chair

Minutes edited by Julie Roland and Logan Witter