

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

June 7, 2010

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mrs. Evans
Mr. Griffith
Mrs. Pritchett
Mr. Scarce
Mr. Jones

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Laramore
Mr. Jennings

STAFF

Clarke Whitfield
Ken Gillie
Christy Taylor
Renee Blair
Emily Scolpini (Intern)

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Griffith at 3:00 p.m.

I. ITEMS FOR PUBLIC HEARING

- 1. Rezoning Request RZ 10-007, filed by Averett University, requesting to amend the Year 2020 Land Use Plan from Urban Single Family to Public and Semi-Public Area and to rezone from OT-R Old Town Residential District to TO-C Transitional Office District, 204 Woodland Avenue, otherwise known as Grid 1718, Block 005, Parcel 00002 of the City of Danville, Virginia Zoning District Map. The applicant is proposing to rezone the property to convert a residence into an office for Averett University.**

Planning Technician Intern, Miss Scolpini read the Staff Report. Eighteen (18) notices were mailed to surrounding property owners within three hundred (300) feet of the subject property. Five (5) respondents were unopposed to the request; six (6) were opposed to the request.

Open the Public Hearing.

Present on behalf of the request was Charles Harris. Mr. Harris stated that he was present to support this application on behalf of Averett University. This is a property at the corner of Woodland and Townes directly across the street from our student center. When we purchased the property we did not have a specific project in mind for it. Rather we knew it was a target of opportunity. If approved, this gives us an opportunity to move an administrative set of functions that are currently in a building in that quadrant of Woodland and Townes to the corner of Townes and Woodland.

Mr. Jones asked what was this house used for before today?

Mr. Harris responded it was a private residence. It has been unoccupied for the last eighteen (18) months.

Mr. Griffith asked has it been vacant since Averett purchased it?

Mr. Harris responded correct. We were actually looking at a number of options for it over that period of time because frankly we had not gotten to a point to begin a process which is a longer term facilities use plan for the Averett Campus, the footprint that is overlooking eighteen (18) acres. This came to us literally as a targeted opportunity. We got a phone call; someone asked are you interested in the property. We made a purchase and as we have done with a couple of these, bought it at my recommendation to the University and the Board. If it fits in term of proximity not with the intent of simply accumulating property, we have an affirmative obligation to look at it if the numbers are right.

Mr. Griffith asked where is the maintenance office at now?

Mr. Harris responded it is actually a little further up Woodland as you turn off of Main. It is the only brick house that remains on that street.

Mr. Griffith asked how many people are going to be in the building?

Mr. Harris responded five (5): Administrative Assistant, Director of Services, Director of Security, Director of Grounds, and Director of Maintenance Services.

Mr. Griffith stated the people that will be there are already employed and are already parking but parking is very limited down there.

Mr. Harris stated all contract employees are required to park in the back of the Ascension Lutheran Church during the week.

Mrs. Pritchett asked so in your opinion Mr. Harris, this use will not cause any kind of congestion or parking issues?

Mr. Harris responded no. Mr. Harris stated that he did not see this as a material change. The difference between the current location and where they would be moving is about one-hundred fifty (150) yards.

Mrs. Pritchett stated that she noticed one of the concerns of the neighbors was parking. I think we should clarify that this will not cause any parking issues.

Mr. Harris stated that he says to parents often when they ask about student parking, we do not have a parking problem; we have a walking problem. We have about four-hundred (400) parking spaces under our control and have another five-hundred (500) at North Campus. Everybody wants to park at the front door. That is a cultural issue and we will just have to deal with that over time. I do not see this particular change making a difference.

Mrs. Evans asked one of the concerns we have about buying houses and renting to students is loud parties and trash. I know the occupants of this particular house should not be doing that but how are you going to address that? Mrs. Evans stated that she lives in that neighborhood and it is true about the loud parties, the trash, and fast driving of cars from Townes Street down to Canterbury.

Mr. Harris responded I accept those observations generally with one point of clarification. We do not rent any student housing. We do not own any property that we rent to students. There are a number of properties in the area that are owned by absentee landlords. We are not one of them. As to driving, the Chief and I have had lots of conversations about it. In fact, they did an interesting report. They did a survey twice last year with the Transportation Department. Turns out the traffic speeds are higher when Averett is in session than when not. They put up some cautionary signs. We continue to remind our students of that. We hold them accountable to the extent that if any Averett vehicle is involved, we have a policy of sanction, frankly removal; which is termination of students working. Beyond that, we ask for the same thing. We want the area to be safe. That is why we have asked the City to help us with another zoning change which builds an elevated crosswalk at Woodland and Townes that will slow down the traffic.

Mr. Scarce stated by making this an administrative office, it would take the house off of the market and eliminate any use for it being rental property. Mr. Scarce asked would it be for administrative use only?

Mr. Harris responded that is correct. I would really struggle to imagine the circumstance that Dr. Franks would allow us to put a residential house into the commercial market for students. It is impossible to manage.

Mr. Jones asked to your knowledge on that block, are there any groups of students renting property from anyone in that area?

Mr. Harris responded no. We took one house that was managed by Shields Realty off the market as well.

Mrs. Evans stated there are some other vacant homes on that street. I am not aware of anyone living there. Mrs. Evans asked do you know what the plans are for those homes?

Mr. Harris responded we own the two (2) houses on the far corner by the cemetery; both of them are occupied by staff. There is a former faculty member who is in the third house. The fourth house is owned by the University and occupied by Staff. There are one (1) or two (2) others in the block between Averett Place and Townes. I think one of them is occupied.

Mr. Griffith stated Mike Maurakis, the Architect lives in one of them. I noticed he did not respond one way or the other.

Mrs. Evans stated the house next to that is vacant.

Mr. Harris stated they have not talked to us.

Close the Public Hearing.

Mr. Scarce made a motion to recommend approval of Rezoning Request RZ 10-007 as submitted. Mr. Jones seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote.

II. ITEMS NOT FOR PUBLIC HEARING

1. Presentation of draft modifications to design guidelines for Historic Protection Overlay (HP-O) District.

Mrs. Blair read the staff report.

Mr. Griffith asked if the Board is to make a recommendation to City Council to adopt?

Mr. Gillie responded you will make a recommendation to City Council to adopt or modify, but since it is such a large and lengthy document we wanted to present it to you now to allow thirty (30) or sixty (60) days, whatever the commission feels is necessary, prior to making a recommendation to City Council. We would like to hold a public hearing at the meeting in July to solicit any citizen input. This has been in multiple hearings including the Commission of Architectural Review for their modifications. We are bringing it to you to see if you have any issues with it between now and the next few weeks. If you have anything that you would like us to modify, please let us know. We would like to advertise this as an actual public hearing item for the meeting in July.

Mr. Griffith asked we will have a public hearing on this at a later date?

Mr. Gillie responded yes. We can have a public hearing at the July meeting. If I do not hear from anyone within the next week or so, I can go ahead and advertise that for July. If you think there are going to be some concerns or questions, we can hold this again and advertise the public hearing for August. That will give Planning Commission a month, so we can discuss it at the next meeting if necessary. If I do not hear from anyone, I will go ahead and advertise this in July.

III. MINUTES

Mrs. Pritchett made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 10, 2010 meeting. Mr. Scearce seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a 5-0 vote.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Gillie stated the one case on South Main Street, the applicant asked for that item to be held over to allow her time to work with some of the adjacent property to address the concerns with spot zoning. That was not heard by City Council at the last meeting. The Special Use Permit on Piney Forest Road was approved per your recommendation. Also, a case from a few months ago on South Ridge Street, the old Eli's facility where the applicant was requesting to put a teen club; the applicant has withdrawn his application for that address. He worked with Staff and found a location that was already permitted. He is going to open the facility in a location that has had this before. He is continuing to work with the Police Department for crowd control and everything else that we had asked him to do as part of the Special Use Permit. He has done it voluntarily for the other site. I just wanted to let you know that case was withdrawn.

Mr. Gillie introduced Miss Emily Scolpini as the Planning Technician Intern. Mr. Gillie stated that Miss Scolpini would be working for a couple weeks. She is a recent graduate from Virginia Tech with a degree in Urban and Regional Affairs. If anyone has any questions, comments, or words of wisdom please stop by and see Emily in the office.

Mr. Gillie stated that Lindy Lowery retired as of May 31, 2010.

Mr. Griffith stated that he wished Mr. Lowery well and welcomed Miss Scolpini.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

APPROVED