

CITY OF EAST PROVIDENCE

PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of October 21, 2009

Present: Burton Batty (Acting as Chair), Krista Moravec, Matthew Robinson (Board); Diane Feather, James Moran, Patrick Hanner, Wayne Barnes (Staff); James Briden (City Solicitor).

The Board recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. SEATING OF ALTERNATE MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN

Mr. Matthew Robinson was seated as a voting member.

Mr. Batty assumed duties as Chairman in the absence of Chairman Robinson.

3. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

A. Minutes of September 14, 2009

The minutes of the September 14, 2009 were not available for this meeting and are “to be submitted”.

3. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BOARD CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Report on Comprehensive Plan (with enclosures)

Ms. Feather noted that Planning Director Boyle was ill and not able to make this evening’s meeting, and passed along her regrets.

Ms. Feather described how each community in Rhode Island has to have an approved Comprehensive Plan that is adopted by the City or Town Council after an advisory recommendation by their respective Planning Board, and then it is sent to the State to be certified. Our land use actions should be based on the Plan. The Plan itself presents a snapshot of where the City is now and a vision for five years from now. She recounted the public participation process leading up to the Planning Department work on the updated plan, as well as the staff’s meeting with Colin Kane of the Peregrine Group, developer of the Rumford Center project. Comments received from numerous stakeholders by David Bachrach of the Community Development Division in preparation for the City’s updated Consolidated Plan will also be infused onto the Comprehensive Plan. All of the planners in the Department are responsible for one or more plan elements.

Ms. Feather noted that the 2010 U.S. Census will occur too late to be integrated into this plan update. She also described the material disseminated to the Board for this discussion including a Land Use Plan executive summary, and a representative sampling of goals and objectives for each plan element.

The Board was then shown a power point presentation similar to what was shown at the initial public meeting on the Comprehensive Plan update.

Patrick Hanner described the sequence involved in getting the Plan adopted including the Board's role as an advisory and review board. He also noted that Statewide Planning could send the plan back to the Planning Department for revision, which in turn could lead to additional review by the Planning Board. The presentation included a listing and brief description of the Plan Elements, which include all of the elements in the current valid plan plus a new element on sustainability. Mr. Hanner went through the goals and objectives that were prepared for tonight's informational meeting, and invited any comments about the Plan in general, or about the individual plan elements.

City Solicitor Briden inquired about cell towers being located on City property. Ms Feather described recent City action including zoning variance requests regarding cell tower installation. Discussion ensued among the Board, staff and the City Solicitor regarding potential upcoming action by the City Council regarding this issue.

There were no other immediate comments or suggestions regarding the individual plan elements. The Board was asked to note any comments they may have from additional review of tonight's material and contact the staff members responsible for the respective elements.

Mr. Barnes noted that the Board will find some redundancy between the new Sustainability Element and other elements, as goals and objectives regarding sustainability are pertinent to several other Plan elements.

Mr. Robinson inquired about City infrastructure improvements including City buildings and the water systems. Mr. Hanner and Mr. Barnes will be contacting the Public Works Department regarding these items and their input will be incorporated into the appropriate Plan elements. Ms. Feather pointed out that the City and RIDOT do coordinate with utility companies regarding their schedule of improvements in relation to City road projects, but the utilities, particularly the natural gas provider, frequently enters newly paved roadways on an "emergency" basis.

Ms. Moravec inquired about the Plan timeframe. Ms. Feather noted that the requirement from Statewide Planning calls for a five-year plan, but that this may increase to a 10-year timeframe by the time the next plan update occurs. The lack of availability of a new decennial census since the last update makes a five-year plan the most practical way to proceed at this point.

Mr. Batty asked that Planning Board members not in attendance at this meeting receive copies of this meeting's Comprehensive Plan material.

Motions

Mr. Robinson moved to accept the staff memorandum which is a preliminary draft of the 2010-2015 Comprehensive Plan, dated October 14, 2009, and supporting documents handed out to the Board, along with the power point presentation, into the record of the meeting.

Ms. Moravec seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Robinson	Aye
Ms. Moravec	Aye
Acting Chairman Batty	Aye

B. Advisory Recommendation on the Recertification of the East Providence Enterprise Zone (with enclosures)

Mr. Moran noted that East Providence was accepted into the Enterprise Zone program in 1995, and that a number of businesses have participated in the program. The designation is reviewed by the Enterprise Zone Council. Our new designation is needed for 2010-2015. The City Council needs to pass a resolution supporting the re-designation of the Zone at their November 3, 2009 meeting and that the application needed to be submitted to the Enterprise Zone Council by November 6th.

The Zone has generally been successful but was more so in its early days, as the tax credit available within the Enterprise Zone has been reduced from \$10,000 per employee to \$2,500 per employee. The City still feels that this is a good tool to promote economic development.

The City is allowed to have five census tracts in the Enterprise Zone. Mr. Moran requests that Tract 103, which includes the eastern Waterman and Taunton Avenue areas, replace Tract 106 which includes the Riverside Square area, as the Waterman and Taunton Avenue areas currently have a large amount of vacant space. Making this area part of the Enterprise Zone could make these properties more attractive for re-use. This request is included within the re-designation applications.

Mr. Moran further requested an advisory opinion from the Planning Board supporting the re-designation of the Enterprise Zone which would be forwarded to the City Council.

Mr. Robinson inquired about Enterprise Zone Tract 107.01 Block 2, property that is now being proposed as residential development, asking why Tract 106 should be dropped rather than Tract 107.01 Block 2, as there are quite a number of businesses in the Bullocks Point Avenue and Crescent View Avenue area that could benefit from the designation. He also asked if it might be possible to include portions of Willett Avenue, such as the Shaw's Plaza area as a means of supporting economic growth in those areas and eliminating the Wampanoag Trail area, since the area is now going to be developed for residential. Mr. Moran stated that because Tract 107.01, Block 2 was added through legislative action by the General Assembly, the City is unable to remove this Block from the Enterprise Zone. He

stated that by law, the City is allowed a maximum of five tracts within the City. Based on the changing distress criteria, the Planning Department believed that the greatest benefit could be accrued by adding Tract 103, a currently economically distressed Tract, over Tract 106, a Tract that has seem minimal participation since its designation in 1995. Mr. Moran noted that no applications have ever come in from that area.

Mr. Robinson asked if there might be the possibility of having Tract 106 added in the future, either at the next designation, or in the interim between now and the next designation period. Mr. Moran said that the City could entertain the possibility of approaching the General Assembly in the interim to add Tract 106 and noted that there also had been discussion with the City of Pawtucket a few years back about adding the Narragansett Industrial Park land through legislative action. Mr. Moran stated that it may be problematic to approach the General Assembly about additional tax break opportunities given the State's current budget woes. Mr. Robinson stated that he understood why we were taking this approach in the re-designation, but added that the City should look at the potential of adding areas in the City that could benefit from the Enterprise Zone.

Motions

Mr. Robinson moved to accept the staff report dated October 16, 2009, with respect to the draft of the re-designation of the City of East Providence Enterprise Zone into the record. Ms. Moravec seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Robinson	Aye
Ms. Moravec	Aye
Acting Chairman Batty	Aye

Mr. Robinson requested and received clarification on the requested Board action. Mr. Robinson then moved to make an advisory opinion to the City Council to adopt the draft and support the Enterprise Zone re-designation application and resolution in support of Enterprise zone re-designation.

Ms. Moravec seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Robinson	Aye
Ms. Moravec	Aye
Acting Chairman Batty	Aye

5. CONTINUED BUSINESS

There was no continued business.

6. STAFF REPORT

Ms. Feather completed an application for a \$66,000 Statewide Planning Challenge Grant for a planning study of the “automile” area on Taunton Avenue, given concerns regarding numerous vacancies at closed auto dealerships and auto-related business in that area. Among possibilities for re-use are multi-family housing and an improved RIPTA hub for the City.

Mr. Hanner noted that the City received a \$15,000 grant from the RI Heritage Preservation Commission to do an architecture survey of the Phillipsdale neighborhood to identify unique features of the neighborhood that we may want to preserve as part of a Historic District. Such a designation would give owners tax credits for exterior renovations to buildings in the district. The newly formed Historic District Commission will work with the Planning Department on developing a property inventory and working on a final report.

Ms. Feather noted that the new Stop and Shop was about to open at Wampanoag Plaza. It is smaller than some of the huge supermarkets that have recently opened.

Mr. Barnes discussed the East Bay Energy Consortium, which is a volunteer effort among nine cities and towns from East Providence southward through Little Compton and Newport to investigate the possibility of establishing a regional alternative energy systems that would be of benefit to all nine communities. The group has received a \$140,000 grant to commission studies of the feasibility of this type of an effort. Applied Science Associates, Inc. (ASA) of South Kingstown, who worked with Portsmouth on the new turbine at Portsmouth High School, was awarded this contract. This is unrelated to any hydropower initiatives that may be studied at the Hunt’s Mills site in East Providence.

8. ANNOUNCEMENT

Planning Board members will be polled regarding the scheduling of the next meeting being held on November 16, 2009, one week later than what would normally be the time of the monthly meeting, to allow some additional time to work on a full Comprehensive Plan draft.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Robinson made a motion to adjourn the meeting.
Ms. Moravec seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 pm.

WAB

H: Planning Board/09-1021 Minutes