

Planning and Zoning Commission Work Session Minutes
May 22, 2024
Conference Room 1A & 1B - 1st Floor City Hall

Call to Order

Commissioners Present – Carroll, Dunn, Geuea Jones, MacMann, Loe, Placier, Stanton, Wilson
Commissioners Absent – Ford
Staff Present –Craig, Zenner

Introductions

Approval of Agenda

Meeting agenda adopted unanimously

Approval of Minutes

The April 18, 2024 work session minutes were approved unanimously with Commissioner Wilson abstaining.

New Business

A. Inclusionary Housing Article

Mr. Zenner provided an overview of how this item was placed on the agenda and explained that given the current zoning provisions within the UDC that the City of Columbia’s zoning requirements do not explicitly preclude housing styles and price points similar to that which were referenced in the article resulting in the the State of New Jersey implementing an “inclusionary” zoning mandate for its communities. Mr. Zenner noted that the topic of inclusionary zoning was previously discussed with the City Council and that Tim Teddy had prepared a report on the topic. Following the report, no further direction was given for staff to work on specific revisions to implement such a zoning framework.

Mr. Zenner further noted that implementation of inclusionary zoning into the Code would require significant research and additional staff resources for effective management. Additionally, he noted that it is more likely the reason segregation within the city’s neighborhoods with respect to housing availability and affordability is not necessarily a zoning matter, but rather one more rooted in lending practices and profit motivations by development professionals. He reiterated that the city’s zoning has many options available to allow for the production of a wide spectrum of housing types. This is in stark contrast to what was occurring within New Jersey in which State Legislation was needed to address that culture.

Following Mr. Zenner’s remarks, Commissioner Wilson, who requested that this matter be added to the agenda, gave a personal testimonial about the impacts and challenges that presently exist within the local market to finding “quality”, affordable housing. She also suggested the city could do better and that everyone deserves a decent place to live. Chairman Geuea Jones noted that her takeaway from the article was that it illustrated a “cautionary tale” of how not to zoning or development standards that unintentionally price housing out of reach for every. She noted that some of the concern raised in the article may be directly applicable to the Commission’s current efforts in establishing use-specific standards for “small lot” development.

There was additional general Commission discussion relating to the article. This discussion focused primarily on the lack of examples of what types of housing are now being built in New Jersey to meet the enacted legal requirements for inclusionary housing. Some Commissioners cited that it may be being met by construction of multi-family dwellings. Mr. Zenner reminded the Commission that the small lot regulations were focused on increasing lots available for a variety of single-family, small footprint homes and did not include multi-family housing as an option on the smaller lots. To switch direction at this point would be possible; however, such an endeavor may be a separate activity. Given the lack of direction to do that

activity and the other pressing issues that will be coming to the Commission, Mr. Zenner noted that tackling the topic of inclusionary zoning may need wait.

In response to that recommendation some Commissioners expressed frustration and compared the suggestion to other historical events such as the movement to end segregation and the establishment of black voting rights. It was suggested that if the recommendation to wait on addressing those issues were followed, as it had been recommended, the matters may still not be addressed today. A rhetorical question was raised “if not now, when”.

Mr. Zenner was asked to produce the report prepared by Mr. Teddy to help further the Commission’s understanding of what was previously discussed with respect to inclusionary housing. Mr. Zenner noted he would gather that information and provide it to the Commission for their review. He further noted that the project the Commission was presently engaged in is a step in the direction of addressing housing needs; however, also acknowledged that the success of this new zoning option lies fully with those that produce housing and finance it.

Old Business

A. UDC Text Amendment – Small Lots

Mr. Zenner provided an overview of the revisions that were made since the April 18 work session noting that he had added to the work previously done and would continue to do so moving forward so all the use-specific standards were in a single document. He stated that he had updated the previously presented text to ensure consistency as in describing distances or fractional parts of a development in decimals as was requested by Commissioner Wilson.

Mr. Zenner further discussed how he came up with the 300 square feet of open space centralized open space in development greater than 30 lots. He noted that as he reviewed the standards it occurred to him that such a requirement was actually potentially creating an unintended consequence that may drive up development cost. He asked the Planning Commissioners to reflect on what they were truly trying to achieve with the requirement of open space outside a privately maintained lot and they could “circle back” to the topic at a future work session. He recommended a couple of options to allow for currently protected development features to be considered for “common” open space that may result in not creating the need for a neighborhood or homeowners association for the maintenance of these features.

The discussion of the updated use-specific standards transitioned to the how to “not have parking requirements drive development form”. He went through the proposed provisions which contained two possible options. The first addressed the ability to move a parking space on a lot less than 5000 sq. ft. and narrower than 59-feet to the property line. He explained that this technique would encourage the development of private driveways of 10-ft on either side of a shared property to serve as a “common” driveway to potentially a rear detached garage. There was Commission discussion on this proposed revision and Commission indicated general support of the change.

The second revision proposed allowing on-street parking to be counted for the required off-street parking. Mr. Zenner noted that staff was not supportive of reducing the parking requirements and offered several examples as to why. He noted that the proposed amendment would again apply to lots less than 5000 sq. ft only and would be controlled by 3 factors. There was Commission discussion this recommended option and it was noted that a revision should be made to ensure that for “every” vehicle parked off-site a minimum of 23-feet of curblin frontage should be present in front of the subject lot. Mr. Zenner recognized what this was recommended and noted it could be addressed in a future revision. Discussion on this proposed amendment was not completed prior to the end of the work session and it was noted that it would resume at the June 6 meeting.

As a part of the general discussion on the existing use-specific standards it was request that a definition of “New Development” be created so it was understood what staff meant by the term in the context of the use-specific standards. Additional Commissioners sought to have the information on the zoning district distribution (i.e. acres per zoning district) over time provided. It was noted the last time such information

was provided may have been 2-3 years ago. Mr. Zenner noted he would prepare the new definition and have the acreage table re-run for the next work session.

Mr. Zenner thanked the Commission for the comments and noted that the staff would continue to work on preparing the remaining use-specific standards identified during the April 4 work session.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:55 pm.

Actions taken:

Motion made to approve the agenda as submitted by Commission MacMann and seconded by Commissioner Loe. Motion made to approve the April 18, 2024 work session minutes as presented by Commissioner MacMann and seconded by Commissioner Loe with Commissioner Dunn abstaining.