

Planning and Zoning Board

Minutes

Thursday, September 17, 2009

7:00 p.m.

The Blowing Rock Planning and Zoning Board met on Thursday, September 17, 2009 for their regular scheduled meeting. Chairman West called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Members present were Debbie di Santi, Brenda Fairbetter, Nelda Miller, Sue Sweeting, Web Alexander and Jim Steele. Staff members present were Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Town Manager Scott Hildebran and Administrative Assistant Sherrie Pitts. Members absent were Ada Webster and Greg Grana.

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alexander. All members were in favor of the motion.

Items of Business

Extensions of Nonconforming Situations

Mr. Rothrock discussed the staff report with the board in continuation from the August meeting. He discussed the changes recommended by the board in the draft ordinance included in the packet with text changes being highlighted.

Mr. Steele recommended definitions of deck and porch be added to the Land Use Code.

With no further questions of staff the floor was opened to the public for comment and closed without comments.

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to approve draft ordinance with the inclusion of definitions for deck, porch and patio. Mr. Alexander seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.

Establishment of Town Center District

Mr. Rothrock gave the staff report to the board in reference to establishing a Town Center District. Adding in Section 16-136 - (H), the TC District is designed to accommodate a wide variety of commercial activities (particularly those that are pedestrian oriented) that will result in the most intensive and attractive use of the town's Central Business district, while protecting the historical character of the downtown core primarily along Main Street. He advised that changes included would allow zero lot lines for buildings, non-supported awnings could extend into setbacks, and he summarized building height changes.

Chairman West explained to the public the reason for creating a Town Center district comes from the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Sweeting asked for Mr. Rothrock to address a letter sent by Mr. Tom Matthews.

Mr. Rothrock stated that Mr. Matthews owns a home in the Central Business district and his main concern is to have his property protected with a buffer from the business district.

Ms. di Santi requested that in the future any correspondence from concerned parties be emailed to the board members if received after packets have been mailed to the board members.

With no other questions of staff the floor was opened to the public.

Sue Glenn of Blowing Rock Realty discussed setback and height restrictions that would not allow her to remove and enlarge the rear portion of her building.

Mr. Rothrock talked about the setback and height restrictions and options.

Annie Whatley, owner of Village Café, stated concerns about the future of town and development. She had questions regarding five foot setback verses 0 lot line setbacks. She also commented on required larger front setbacks to create green space and how it simply produces areas that allow pedestrians to leave or drop more trash. Ms. Whatley also had concerns regarding tree protection.

Ken Barnebey, owner of the Blowing Rock Realty building, said he would like for the board to look at changing the height restrictions.

Karen Herterich, owner of SouthMarke, stated that she had looked at the buildings downtown to see which properties would be most affected. She commented that a recently built building that was required to use the current setbacks had basically created a park which allowed pedestrians to sit on the stone walls blocking the store entries with strollers and dogs. This crowding created entry difficulty for the employees and customers of the building. She also asked that if the board looked at changing height restrictions it would be good if they looked at setbacks in relation to neighboring buildings.

Mark Crumpler, owner of Windwood Antiques and The Brass Exchange, had questions about the draft ordinance regarding awnings. He also had concerns about buildings being removed having to follow the new setbacks and how it would make the buildings look more choppy if neighboring buildings were on the sidewalk. Mr. Crumpler said that a rumor going around was the new district would create additional tax on the Town Center businesses. He also asked why the TC district did not extent to Knight's on Main.

Mr. Steele, board member, remarked the Hyatt-Palma study recommended starting the Town Center district at Hwy 221 and follow through to Chestnut Street to maintain the look of downtown and ensure the character and flavor of the center of town.

Mike Moore, owner of The Martin House, stated that he agreed with Mr. Crumpler that the businesses past Hwy 221 should be included in the TC, such as, Footsloggers, Cabin Fever and Hartley's Interiors.

Sue Glenn said that she would like to see a simple calculation that would allow behind buildings to build higher.

Ms. Whatley mentioned that her single lot is being divided in the TC District. She also questioned why Sunset Dr. was not included in the TC.

Mr. Rothrock said the zoning division was not intentional. The zoning was set up to include properties on Main Street. Chairman West explained reasons for not including Sunset Drive and Morris Street.

Ms. Herterich emphasized looking at Sonny's building being removed, requiring a 15 foot setback and what would be seen.

With no other questions or comments the floor was closed to public comment.

Mr. Steele recommended the board look at the east side buildings and allow them to build at the sidewalk and go to allowable height within the ordinance. The buildings on the west side are already set back. In keeping with that essence, he recommended a larger allowable building height for those properties like Blowing Rock Realty.

Ms. di Santi agreed with Mr. Steele. She said that property owners should be allowed to rebuild and increase building height with a specified setback be allowed to go to 40 feet in height.

Ms. Sweeting had questions about Sonny's building replacement and going up a level.

With questions arising from the public *Ms. di Santi made a motion to reopen public comment. Ms. Miller seconded the motion. All members were in favor.*

Business owner Ms. Thamena Hanna wanted to know if it would be possible to add a second floor to her building.

Chairman West stated under current rules a second story would have to set back 15 feet.

Mr. Larry Imeson, business owner, talked about the Sonny's building and setback requirements.

Mr. Jim Brown, business owner, commented on a vacant property on Main Street that he owns. He felt that a 15 foot setback would penalize future development. He did like the zero lot line and said that he would like to work with his neighboring building for development.

Mr. Crumpler had other comments on setbacks and rebuilding in the TC district.

With no other questions or comments the floor was closed to public comment.

Mr. Rothrock had comments to the board for discussion in regard to public comments. He said to consider using the average setback on the east side but not less than 5 feet, and allow a second story with at least a 5 foot setback. On the west side the average setback could be 15 feet with larger lots increasing their setback and allow building height up to 40 feet.

Mr. Steele remarked that he would like the board to look at including the northern properties within the TC district.

Chairman West discussed large tracts and how building height would be calculated. Would large retaining walls require buildings to be stepped down to maintain the 40 foot building height or could the back of the buildings be excessively tall? Staff and the board agreed the building should be stepped down as necessary for height requirements.

Ms. Sweeting made a motion to send this item back to subcommittee for study to return to the Planning Board. Mr. Alexander seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.

Chairman West pointed out to the public that the Planning Board does and would receive any letters and e-mails sent to the Planning office in regard to issues before the Board.

Mr. Rothrock requested a date change for the next Planning Board meeting. Monday, October 19th was set for the next meeting. Zoning subcommittee should meet before the next meeting.

With no other comments or questions *Mr. Steele made a motion to adjourn. Ms. di Santi seconded the motion. All members were in favor of the motion.*

Adjourn

With no further business the Planning Board adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Jim West, Chairman

Sherrie Pitts, Administrative Assistant