

La Plata Planning Commission
Town Hall, La Plata, Maryland
July 2, 2002, 7:00 PM

Present: Chairman Raymond J. Becmer, Walter T. Sollars, Jr., C. Keith Back - Commission Members; Douglas R. Miller, Town Manager; Patricia L. Bembe, Assistant Town Manager; Steven F. Schroeder, Project Manager; Judith T. Frazier (Due to the absence of Mr. Echols and Mr. Hale, Mr. Back had full voting rights.)

Guests: (See roster.)

Minutes:

Chairman Becmer called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and read the agenda. Mr. Miller asked that item #8, CVS, be removed from the agenda. Chairman Becmer asked Mr. Sollars to lead the Commission and audience in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of June minutes

Mr. Hettel made a motion to approve the minutes of the June meeting. Mr. Sollars seconded the motion and it carried.

Park and Ride

Jamie Kendrick, Project Manager with Maryland Transit Administration, provided an information packet and displayed a site plan of the proposed Park and Ride lot, which is planned to have more than 300 spaces, on a parcel of land on Washington Avenue, just north of the Burleigh House parcel. He explained that ridership on bus routes 901, 903 and 905 have grown to the point that they need a larger, permanent home than the 50 leased spaces at the Food Lion parking lot. He further explained that on-going discussions with Charles County government regarding the County maintaining the lot resulted in an agreement with conditions which include minimal landscaping within the lot. More landscaping will be placed on the perimeter of the lot. There will be on-site stormwater management and a deceleration/acceleration lane on Washington Avenue. MTA conducted a public information meeting on May 29, 2002, which an estimated 25 people attended. He remarked that they are not anticipating an additional or significant traffic impact on Washington Avenue.

In the discussion which followed, the Planning Commission expressed concern that the landscaping be in keeping with the attractive style provided along the Washington Avenue corridor, and encouraged that extra landscaping be installed along the front and along the property line shared with the Burleigh House. They also discussed lighting on the parking lot, which Mr. Kendrick explained was a security feature but which could be set on timers so as not to be a disturbance to the neighborhood after a certain hour when bus riders would have returned to the lot and walked to their vehicles. Mr. Kendrick also pointed out that the lot could be made available for special events use on weekends. Mr. Kendrick noted that sidewalks will be constructed across the entire front property line, and that the County would be responsible for all maintenance on the lot, including trash pick-up and an annual sweeping.

Bowling, Scott Building

Steve Scott and Scott Bowling were present to discuss their proposed rebuilding plan for their law office on La Grange Avenue, which was destroyed by the tornado. They plan to rebuild on the exact same footprint of their previous 4500 sq. ft. building, but will be adding a second floor, bringing their total building size to 6500 sq. ft. The building will be all brick. Their contractor, Dick Dickerson, advised them he can have their building finished by mid-January. They have had favorable discussions with the Town regarding the proposed extension to Centennial Street, which would affect parking on their lot but which could be offset by 45° parking along La Grange Avenue. They agreed with the Town to progress with their building plans and deal with the proposed street extension at a later date. They also have a contract on the Jeff Posey lot on Maple Avenue, which they may develop as an investment building at a future date.

The Planning Commission commended Mr. Bowling and Mr. Scott for their plan to rebuild an all-brick building and encouraged them to provide an attractive landscaping plan.

Parking in the Central Business District

Mr. Miller explained that the Town needs to look at parking and other standards in the Central Business District, and that Mayor Eckman was present to discuss the parking issue. Each member was provided with copies of parking information from Michael Paone and Larry Duket of the Maryland Dept. of Planning.

Mayor Eckman explained that the Vision Plan the Town has been working on for the past four years proposes a higher density with a mix of residential and commercial in the downtown, which is being proposed as a by-right rather than special exception use. He noted that the Planning Commission will be asked to make that change. He further noted that the Governor has committed funding for streetscapes and has given authority to go beyond the State's roads, and the Town will probably gain more on-street parking which can be used to mitigate for uses in the downtown. Mayor Eckman advised that the Town must look at our parking regulations and remarked that changes to the parking regulations are needed in the Central Business District only. Mayor Eckman outlined the proposed changes, which will have to go through the public hearing process before they may be implemented:

- (1) After comparing our parking regulations with other Maryland municipalities, it is suggested the Town reduce our requirements to one space per 300 sq. ft. for retail uses.
- (2) Where the use is residential with commercial, don't require additional parking for the residential use if the square footage of each use is equal or if residential square footage is less than the commercial amount.
- (3) DBED grant money will be used to provide more parking in the downtown. The Town Code currently allows businesses in the CBD to use municipal parking as part of their required spaces if the parking is within 400' of their property. The suggested change is to allow that to be within 800'.
- (4) It is suggested that the Town allow credit for on-street parking spaces in the neighborhood.

During the brief discussion which followed, the Planning Commission indicated their support of measures the Town may take which will encourage rebuilding in the Town.

Mr. Hettel remarked that owners of houses in the Quailwood neighborhood which were demolished

have not begun to rebuild or remove the rubble. He advised he believes there are health and safety hazards involved in leaving the properties like that and asked what the Town planned to do to have the owners clean up their lots. Mr. Miller advised that the Town purposely left them alone through May and June to resolve insurance issues. As it is believed that those issues should be resolved by now, the Town will begin to contact the property owners to encourage action on their part.

Dash-In (not present)

Shepard's Meadow curb, gutter and sidewalk (developer not present) - Mr. Miller explained that this has been submitted as a 3-lot subdivision and that the developer is asking to be exempted from the curb, gutter and sidewalk requirements, as outlined in a letter from Robert Heier, Ben Dyer Associates, dated June 19, 2002 (copy provided to each Commission member.) The Planning Commission was in agreement to require curb, gutter and sidewalk.

Other business

R. J. Earnshaw suggested that the Park and Ride Lot be put on the State's property at the cemetery on Rt. 301, over 200 acres the State purchased for the proposed expansion of Rt. 301.

There being no other business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 8:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith T. Frazier