



Radford Planning Commission
Wednesday, June 22, 2022
Municipal Building

Members Present: Mr. Watson, Chairperson
Mr. Gillespie
Ms. Hamden
Mrs. Huntington
Dr. Pearce
Mr. Howard, Vice-Chairperson

Absent: Mr. Collier
Staff/Visitors: Melissa Skelton, City Staff

Chairperson Watson called the meeting to order at 5:36 pm in the Radford City Council Chambers at 10 Robertson Street, Radford Virginia. A quorum was present.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Huntington made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. Hamden.

Voting Yes: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mr. Howard, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Watson

Approval of Minutes for May 16, 2022

Minutes were recommended for approval as submitted by Mr. Gillespie, seconded by Ms. Hamden.

Voting: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mr. Howard, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Watson

Abstain: None

OLD BUSINESS:

SUBJECT: RZ-22-002 (Portion of 10 Forest Ave.) (First Apostolic Church of Radford, on behalf of New River Concrete Supply)

SUMMARY: First Apostolic Church of Radford, on behalf of New River Concrete Supply has submitted an application seeking approval of a rezoning of a portion of Tax Map # 18-(1)-1. The request is to rezone from M-2 Heavy Industrial to B-1, Limited Business for the development of a church.

Ms. Skelton reported on the findings of the public hearing. One comment was made in the hearing, but it was supportive. Several inquiries were also made by phone to the city planner, but they were mainly for information. No negative comments were received.

Mr. Howard inquired as to whether the purchase was final, and the representatives responded that it was in process. Ms. Skelton confirmed that the subdivision plat was presently under review.

Mrs. Huntington noted that the church has a very passionate plan for the development and has contributed positively to the community. She is supportive to property owners' development of their sites to forward their goals. At the same time, she also has concerns about removing industrial properties from the city's rosters. There is a limited quantity of appropriately zoned undeveloped land in the city that is appropriate for industry, less than 25% of which is located outside of the flood plain. Much of this is not located conveniently to transportation such as this site is. This poses a tension between the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and the goals of the church as expressed in their proposal.

Ms. Hamden echoed this concern. She noted the reasons cited by the church such as river access and existing foundations that made this a preferred site and asked whether there were additional reasons to choose this site. The representatives responded that their relationship to the existing owner, the location of the site in the West End of the city, and the capacity of the site's existing business to continue to operate with the remaining portion of the property were all factors in favor of the church's choice.

Ms. Hamden asked about the possibility of the city acquiring the property, and Ms. Skelton replied that it had been considered but did not go forward due to cost.

Mr. Gillespie echoed previous concern about being landlocked as a city and the tension between that and the benefits of the church's visions for this site. He acknowledged the challenges of getting manufacturing jobs to come to the city and stated that if the church's plan didn't go forward, there was a chance that the site might sit idle for another 30 years.

Mr. Watson noted that much of the site is below the flood plain, which constrains its use for manufacturing in the future. The development of significant residential parcels in this area plus conservation district along the river makes this industrial parcel landlocked itself. There are therefore reasons why this site might not be attractive for industrial use, even if it was preserved as such.

The church representatives stated that they are proceeding with the purchase in any event, whether it is rezoned or not. They pointed out that much of their site, being located in the flood plain, is not suitable for significant use by the church.

Dr. Pearce asked whether it might make sense to maintain existing zoning for parts of the site that are not suitable for intensive use by the church. The representatives replied that the parts they might maintain as industrial zoned are located such that they're unlikely useful for industrial use anyway. They further explained that negotiations with the current owner took into account the owner's vision for restarting the site as a concrete plant and allowed for necessary uses.

Dr. Pearce also noted that there are two issues really in play here – the zoning's influence on property tax income from the property and the portions of the site that will go off the tax rolls when the property becomes owned by the church, vs. the attractiveness of the site to potential industry. The site's flood risk as well as potential prior environmental issues due to the salt plant and other operations may also be relevant to future industrial investment.

Mr. Howard noted that the site as presently in use doesn't generate a lot of revenue in its current state of development via property taxes – there is very low development value with the concrete plant.

Several commissioners noted that the comprehensive plan directs this area to be for industrial use as part of its future land use. Dr. Pearce responded by stating that we are due to begin updating our comprehensive plan this year, so we are not necessarily bound to consider what it says as carved in stone.

Mr. Watson stated that it could be possible to rezone a smaller portion of the site but leave most of it as it is. This may be something to consider. The idea of mixed use was also raised as a possibility instead of the proposed B zoning. The implications, given possibilities being introduced with the zoning code rewrite, are not entirely clear at this point.

Ms. Hamden asked whether there was a timeline for the project that shows the overall development with key milestones, and Dr. Pearce asked about financing, design, and construction. The church has purchased a standardized steel building and is having it site adapted and reengineered. Financing and contractors are in place, and all activities will scale up from existing operations at their current undersized facility.

Mr. Howard pointed out that many of the churches in the city are presently failing, and there may be quite a few vacant churches in the city at present. He asked about how those properties come back on the tax rolls, and Ms. Skelton replied that their tax status changes when the ownership changes back to a non-church owner.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mrs. Huntington, seconded by Mr. Howard to table the discussion until the next meeting (July 18) to allow time to consult others, including the Economic Development Authority. This will provide additional information that can inform a better decision for all involved.

Voting Yes: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mr. Howard, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Watson

Voting No: None

Abstain: None

NEW BUSINESS:

SUBJECT: Nominating Committee

SUMMARY: A nominating committee is required to appoint candidates for officers. Mr. Howard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Gillespie, that we table this item until all members can be present.

Voting Yes: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mr. Howard, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Watson

Voting No: None

Abstain:

SUBJECT: Consider approval of 2022-23 Calendar

Wednesdays were discussed as problematic due to school calendars. Dr. Pearce teaches on Tuesdays and Thursdays in spring semester but could attend meetings if they began on those nights at 7 pm.

ACTION: A motion was made by Mr. Howard, seconded by Mrs. Huntington, to approve the FY 2022-23 subject to proposed changes, with the caveat that we can change it as we need to.

Voting Yes: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mr. Howard, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Watson

Voting No: None

Abstain:

WORK SESSION – ZONING ORDINANCE UPDATE

We agreed to defer review until next meeting and review alternative ways to go through the ordinance holistically.

STAFF REPORT:

Ms. Skelton had a discussion with a developer regarding high end townhomes on Lovely Mount road, Cedar Ridge townhomes/condos. This will require a rezoning.

Renew the New is August 27 – save the date!

COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Gillespie – no additional comment.

Ms. Hamden – So appreciative for a great discussion! Was feeling conflicted, but the conversation helped to sort through it. It's good to have an opportunity to seek out more information.
Appreciated the opportunity to talk open and honestly.

Mrs. Huntington – no additional comment.

Dr. Pearce – This is challenging, but great discussion.

Mr. Howard – The discussion tonight has brought mixed feelings. We are grateful for the work churches have done, but many have taken advantage of businesses that pay no taxes. These enterprises support the community but do not, at the same time. There are many churches before this one that have “aged out”, and no church is immune from that. Having churches take big chunks of land off the tax rolls is something we cannot have more of. When any use of the property is said to be worship-related, all of the property goes off the tax rolls. It's not a huge monetary loss, but we have set a dangerous precedent. We're now at nearly 50% untaxable land area if not more. We cannot allow any more property to become untaxable.

Mr. Watson – excellent discussion with First Apostolic Church. An interesting possibility – should we allow churches in M2? Another possibility was zoning as Mixed Use. This is a great opportunity for the property, and we should for ways to make it happen.

A motion was made by Mr. Watson, to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 pm, seconded by Ms. Hamden.

Voting Yes: Mr. Gillespie, Ms. Hamden, Mrs. Huntington, Dr. Pearce, and Mr. Howard

Voting No: None

Abstain: None

Submitted by: Annie Pearce, Secretary
Date: June 22, 2022