Athens City Planning Commission
Minutes of Public Hearing & Regular Meeting
November 19, 2020, 12:00 p.m.

The regular meeting of the Athens City Planning Commission was held virtually on November 19, 2020.

Attendees: none

1. **Call to Order**

RJ Sumney welcomed new commissioner John Kotowski.

RJ Sumney called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 12:05 p.m. Quorum was established.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS:

RJ Sumney, Chair	Present
Nancy Bain, Vice Chair	Present
John Kotowski	Present
Steve Patterson, Mayor	Present
Tom Pyle, Interim Service-Safety Director	Present
STAFF:	
Paul Logue, City Planner	Present
David Riggs, Code Enforcement Director	Present

2. **Disposition of Minutes**

RJ Sumney moved to accept the October 1, 2020 minutes. Tom Pyle seconded. Motion passed 4:0 (John K. abstained).

4. **Cases**

2040 Comprehensive Plan – vote on recommendation to City Council

Paul Logue/review

- This has been an effort since late 2017, with visioning and public workshops. Assistance from interns who helped with information gathering, surveys, etc.
- In 2019 he had a draft document and was planning to submit for review in early 2020. This was delayed due to the pandemic, until August when he brought it to the Planning Commission.
- Next step is for the commission to recommend approval to City Council.
- Vision statement was set in March, 2018.
- There were broad community takeaways including:
    - Need to diversify the local economy for survival and success. Not much room for growth.
    - Interest in moving away from fossil fuels.

- Looked at corridors into the city. Two corridors in particular are key gateways - Stimson and W. Union, as areas to allow growth.
- For Athens to be inclusive and equitable.
- For Athens to be a place people want to call home and a place where people can call home.
- Disabilities Planning.
- Address housing needs.
- Make sure there are high quality recreation opportunities and high quality public arts.

Discussion

- RJ Sumney congratulated Paul on a terrific job, and also recognized the interns and the input from the community.
- John Kotowski asked if Paul looked at the 50/32 corridor (sewer extension project).
    - Paul replied that that corridor was also included in the plan, and that he received feedback from EPW on infrastructure needs. When he worked with the county on the sewer extension project, the priority was the public health issue. There is no zoning or planning for those portions of Athens Twp. so only allowed for a minimal amount of economic development to occur in that corridor, to minimize risk.
- RJ Sumney inquired about conditional permitting for accessory units, and now with the virus if there is now concern about population density. Do garage conversions or accessory structures, for instance, infringe on this?
    - Paul L. replied that as far as the recommendation for the allowance of accessory structures, the need still exists (for aging in place, retrofitting for adults with disabilities, etc.). Regarding the pandemic and the health recommendations at the local, state and federal level, as long as we are all following those rules, we are minimizing our risk of exposure. If we are concerned about these changes there is still an opportunity to investigate timing and discuss public health issues.
- RJ Sumney asked about revisiting parking in R1 and the possibility of stacked parking.
    - Paul L. noted that adopting a comprehensive plan doesn't mean that the laws are changing. In Ohio it is an overall planning strategy. There is flexibility with what we move forward with and when. Some things are intractable.
- RJ Sumney asked about design flexibility for accessible design and universal design. For the exterior design, does too much flexibility take away from a cohesive look?
    - Paul L. replied that he has never spoken to design standards/materials with the exception to historic areas of the city. Yes, it could take away from the uniformity of our community. The flexibility aspect is more geared toward setbacks, etc. The priority should be that someone can live safely in the community.
- RJ Sumney asked about reducing minimum lot sizes in subdivisions.
    - Paul L. responded that subdivision regulations are built for traditional suburban cul-de-sac style neighborhoods. If someone wanted to build small on a larger lot, shared parks, etc., this requires a lot of variances and it turns

people off to pursuing it. Have to think about the per linear foot cost to provide service to the area.
    - Steve P. noted that another piece is the issues that have come forward from the Affordable Housing Commission. Lot size dictates cost. We are at a deficit in the 150-250 range. Some PUD's aren't developed, Oakmont Phase IV is an example. Smaller lots make for more affordable housing.
- RJ Sumney stated that there wouldn't be any more University Estates type developments.
    - Steve P. replied that it depends on the developer and what the market will bear. Right now the market is in the 150-250 range, and those are few and far between.
    - Paul L. noted that several years ago, we did an analyses of our existing sub division regulations. On the west side of Athens most are non-conforming. With the exception of south side of Athens, we couldn't build the city that we have today based on the regulations, variances would be required for every lot. Allowing for smaller lots would end up in development that looks like our city.
- RJ Sumney wondered if increasing the population is something we are looking for.
    - Paul L. replied that the focus is on maintaining population, but doesn't want to shut the door to growth. Don't want a shrinking city.
- RJ Sumney questioned whether we should be going in this direction, having smaller lots and reducing what someone can build in Athens.
    - Paul L. noted that the recommendation is to allow for lower price points, but not limit higher price points.
    - Steve P. noted that this isn't stating that everything moving forward has to be smaller.
- Nancy Bain commented about University Estates, that in the early phase, homes were being built on small lots. Regarding the zoning structure, if a 2nd structure is built on a lot, it is there forever. Recommended that they build in notifications to people in the neighborhood so we don't have another VRBO situation.
- Nancy Bain also commented about sidewalks, people taking shortcuts through the neighborhoods result in safety concerns for pedestrians. There are many areas where there aren't any sidewalks and there is no place for a pedestrian to move off the road if a vehicle is barreling down on them. Madison is an example.
    - Paul L. agreed with Nancy B. on both her concerns.
- John Kotowski agreed with Nancy B. on her comment about pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- Paul Logue commented that he worked with the Commission on Disabilities this summer to address their concerns about moving around the city. So many little things that impact the ability of people with disabilities to move around safely. Addressing those issues and attempting to make this a safer city for everyone. This is a priority but change is slow.

Steve Patterson made a motion to approve and recommend the 2040 Comprehensive Plan to City Council for approval. Nancy Bain seconded. Motion passed 4:0 (one abstention).

5. **Communications**

None

6. **Report from City Planner and Director of Code Enforcement**

Paul Logue

- Work ongoing with the Commission on Disabilities, Mount Zion project, Age Friendly Athens.

David Riggs

- No Report

7. **Opportunity for Citizens to Speak**

No comments

8. **Announcements & Other Business**

Steve Patterson

- Governor's curfew order begins tonight, 10pm-5am.
- Wear your masks, social distance, wash hands. This is in our hands.

The next meeting will be December 3, 2020.

9**.** **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m.

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RJ Sumney, Planning Commission Patricia Witmer, City of Athens