MINUTES
PLANNING BOARD
TUESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2014
7:00 PM
HOOD ROOM, MATTHEWS TOWN HALL

PRESENT: Chair Tom Lawing; Members Steve Lee, David Pratt, and Eric Welsh; Alternate members Barbara Dement and Michael Ham; Town Attorney Craig Buie; Planning Director Kathi Ingrish; Senior Planner Jay Camp, Planner II Jim King and Zoning Technician/Deputy Town Clerk Mary Jo Gollnitz.

ABSENT: Members Gary Turner, Rob Markiewitz and Eric Johnson; Town Attorney Charles Buckley, and Youth Voice Brian Lee.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Tom Lawing called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

David Pratt made a motion and Eric Welsh seconded to have alternate members Barbara Dement and Michael Ham as voting members for this evening's meeting. The vote carried unanimously.

Steve Lee made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 24, 2014 and August 11, 2014 meetings. Eric Welsh seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

ZONING APPLICATION 2014-618 – Erickson Living, Text Amendment, Allow permanent Marketing Center in a CCRC.

Planning Director Kathi Ingrish reviewed for the Board the proposed text amendment 2014-618 to allow permanent marketing center in a CCRC (Continuing Care Retirement Center). She explained that the provisions in the ordinance allow for several uses that can be on the same campus. The proposed text change will add a statement to the UDO for a permanent marketing center as long as it meets parking and landscaping requirements.

Chairman Lawing asked if this was for all CCRC locations. Ms. Ingrish said that as a text amendment, this would apply to existing and future CCRC locations in an R/I district. There are currently four locations that are zoned for CCRC and one location is asking for the permanent center. Mr. Lawing said that they have not heard any comment from the public on this; whether for or against this use.

Barbara Dement stated that it is vitally important that CCRCs do have these marketing units. There is always turnover and this will allow for new and up to date attraction for incoming residents.

Michael Ham asked if this would require additional parking or other requirements that are not there now. Ms. Ingrish said that this would be considered an office use and require one parking space per 300 gross sq. ft. of office. If the CCRC is adding this building, they would have to add the parking.

Steve Lee asked if there is anything in the text that restricts the building from being a manufactured unit. Ms. Ingrish stated that it could be a manufactured unit and would be reviewed with the specific development.

Mr. Ham wanted to know if the existing CCRC facilities would have to come in for additional approvals if they decide to add one of these buildings to their location. Ms. Ingrish answered yes.

Mr. Lee asked if the UDO had the same type of verbiage for an apartment complex. Ms. Ingrish stated no because they are usually combined with community facilities for the complex. They normally do not have a separate facility just for marketing.

Ms. Dement made a motion to recommend for approval of the CCRC text amendment 2014-618 and it is consistent with the policies for development as outlined by the Matthews UDO. Eric Welsh seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

STREET WIDENING CONCEPTS FOR E. JOHN STREET

Ms. Ingrish said that the Town has results of the survey regarding the widening of E. John Street for the Board. She noted that to date there have been 101 responses. Ms. Ingrish explained that the town is trying to get citizen input regarding the potential road widening. Staff felt that the survey would be easier to receive response from the community rather than having a meeting during the summer months. The proposed widening drawings could not be linked to the survey.

Ms. Ingrish provided a summary of the survey responses. She stated that the first survey question discussed the intersection of Trade and John Street as it is today. The survey answers were not a surprise to staff in that most people found it difficult to cross the intersection on foot.

She continued explaining survey question #2. The highest response was to keep a left turn lane in both directions on Trade. The responses indicate that citizens are cognizant of the impact the possible widening of John Street will have. They did not want the widening if it removed businesses and homes along John Street.

Ms. Ingrish noted that all three towns affected by the widening have concerns about the initial concepts provided by NCDOT. One large concern that staff stated to NCDOT is that you cannot remove buildings in the downtown. There is a reason for bringing the buildings close to the road in the downtown. It provides an ambiance that is more important than speeding cars through town. There are too many cars for the amount of pavement and what do you do with the turning lanes to keep traffic flowing.

She continued reviewing the survey. Question #3 asked for opinions on changes along E. John Street at I-485 interchange. The survey opinions were split, with rebuilding the interchange ramps at the same time as Segment B capturing the largest number. Chair Lawing said that he uses that interchange and he does not see the problem with the ramps. He stated that the backups are not from the ramps; the backups start at Potter Road heading into Union County and at E. John Street. David Pratt agreed with Mr. Lawing's statement.

Ms. Ingrish stated that only 12 respondents to question #4 live along the E. John St. corridor. However, 72% access or exit I-485 from E. John Street. Mr. Lawing said that he uses that interchange because it is easier than going through Matthews.

Ms. Ingrish said that DOT has to accommodate all modes of transportation. Survey question #5 addressed usage of sidewalks along E. John Street. Only 43% will use them occasionally and 39% would not use them. This shows that in our community we need to have people think about walking or bicycling as a viable alternative to using a vehicle.

The last survey question asked if there are other places along E. John Street they would like to see a crosswalk. The response showed almost 70% would like to see a crosswalk near the Post Office. Mr. Welsh asked if this was just a crosswalk and no signal light. Ms. Ingrish said yes and that there may be a light at Greylock Ridge Road. There is currently a 10 ft. wide multi-use sidewalk from the greenway entrance on E. John Street over to Greylock Ridge Rd. There will also be a 10 ft. wide sidewalk along the Sportsplex road and they will want to connect that across John Street to the existing sidewalk. The light will hopefully make it more comfortable at that location to cross the street.

She informed the Board that NCDOT will be meeting with Council on September 8 at 5:30pm. Staff from the three towns along this corridor will meet on August 28 with DOT. A group of design professional from DOT will be in Matthews in mid-September to meet with each of the towns individually. The goal is to have the series of questions from the towns answered at that time. The engineers did not anticipate this slowdown. They know there will be impacts but when you see the specific impacts, there may be an alternative to the proposed changes. The engineers want to get as much information from each town as possible. They are hoping that the towns will be somewhat consistent with their requirements along the corridor.

She continued informing the Board that the center median is currently designed for two lanes wide. She does not anticipate the town ever expanding two more lanes along John Street. However, that is DOT's new standard. She explained the concept of super streets and what the impact would be in the downtown. The town can not see that option working in Matthews' downtown. Staff has asked for that option to be removed from the table.

Steve Lee said that the more he thought of this the more he does not like it. The more lanes the more congestion you will have. You will have more people using the road. The speed limit will still be same. He continued stating that it is not a standard road and not hard to cross. If you make it a super street then he would be scared to cross the road. There will be no less traffic.

Mike Ham stated that you if you build more lanes there will be more traffic. It will be a never ending cycle. He just came back from driving on Old Route 66, and there was dead town after dead town. These towns were vibrant until someone decided getting traffic by the towns quicker was a good idea. He believes that there will be some of the same consequences here in Matthews. A super road will not be helpful to the town.

Mr. Lawing said that the he can see the widening past downtown to I-485. He understands the widening of John Street beyond I-485 south. He does not see directing traffic from I-485 through Matthews to 74 or to Charlotte. He lives in downtown Matthews and would rather bypass downtown. He does not feel E. John needs to be widened. Mr. Lee stated that he lives downtown and it is a half hour trip in the morning and 15 minutes of that trip is getting through downtown. He would rather see downtown stay vibrant than rush traffic through. All the investment at the community center, historic buildings, Stumptown Park, and other vital parts of the community would be split off with a divide.

Mr. Welsh agreed that building a super street would create more traffic. Looking at the survey, most respondents stated that they use E. John Street to access I-485. He would rather see changes to sidewalks, bike lanes and encourage other modes of transportation. That helps support the downtown. He knows traffic is a problem, but that will not improve by widening the road. He does have concern about placing too many crosswalks that may create more issues with the traffic.

Ms. Dement said that she feels there may be some solution in the middle. She lives, works and volunteers here. She does not want to see a super street because it will totally destroy the downtown. However, she feels that the town has been remiss in not doing anything for decades and does not want to see that happen again. We can't consider Matthews a sleepy little town anymore; we are an integral part of a bigger traffic problem. She would like to have two lanes going north and south, even if that does mean affecting some of the current businesses. Looking forward, changes that are made today, should maintain the small hometown feel. However, we have to be smart and realistic. She continued stating that the Exxon station could be reconfigured. This would not be comfortable and not easy. We have a problem with all the traffic coming to the squeeze down in downtown. She said that we can't preserve everything but preserve what make sense and vital to our history.

Mr. Ham said that he agrees that something has to change. It is not just about traffic flow. People's attitudes have to change regarding transportation. We can't continue to have 5,000 cars come through with one person in each car. You can't keep building concrete roads. The State is responsible for increasing public transportation and using it. People need to be more pedestrian friendly. These are part of the equation. It is not just widening roads; there is much more to the equation than that.

Mr. Welsh stated that there may be options out there that strike the middle ground. But a lot of these options are so counter to what Matthews is and what it should be. Specifically, impacting parking for the Farmers Market, he has a hard time dealing with that. He said that there are a lot of options and in his opinion some of them do not work.

Ms. Dement said that yes it will have an impact on some particular businesses, but are we keeping other businesses from coming to town and preventing people from stopping. Mr. Lee said that this is an odd situation where this road would be allowing people from Union County a quicker route to get through Matthews. He does not believe that we need to widen this intersection. We don't need to make another Arboretum intersection. Every intersection configuration is as wide as the Arboretum intersection. That intersection is huge and feels like

a major thoroughfare. He does not believe widening will produce more economic development. Ms. Dement said that there is only one lane going out of town and having two lanes would help with the traffic flow.

Mr. Ham said that you could address this via reverse lanes. It works on Monroe Road in Charlotte and at the speedway. This reduces what you have to do to the roads. Mr. Lee asked about a possible traffic circle at the intersection. Ms. Ingrish said that someone had designed a traffic circle which was skewed to the south side of the road. She further noted a parallel road would be Independence Pointe Parkway. The concept for several years has been that Greylock Ridge Road would be extended from E. John Street, go up across railroad tracks, through the Sportsplex and parallel Independence Blvd. Ms. Dement asked where construction on that road stands. Ms. Ingrish said that it is only an approved concept. With the Sportsplex and entertainment district the Town has been pushing the County to construct the road. The Town has been speaking with the railroad for crossing approval. The railroad has given an ok on the preliminary drawings at grade crossing. The Town can now pursue getting more detailed engineering on the crossing. However, the funding has not been determined and the road location on private land connection has not been determined. With no development you can not get exact location of where the road would be. It is a line on a map at this time.

Mr. Lee said that we are going from two lane into one towards Stallings. One of the in-between solutions to the problem is the widening of the area of I-485 to the center of town. That road needs improvements and would make traffic flow better from Union County. He would not add any more lanes.

Ms. Ingrish will find out more from the State and provide it to both Council and this Board. Your comments tonight will be sent to Council. The Transportation Advisory Board comments will also be sent to the Council.

Mr. Pratt asked what the time frame is for the project. Ms. Ingrish said that this is for design plans and environmental assessment. They started looking at a six lane road. That didn't accomplish anything more than a four lane divided road would handle. They have come back with four lane divided with left turns at intersections or no left turns with super street concepts. Mr. Ham asked if they will be doing an Economic Impact Study with public comment before they make decisions. Ms. Ingrish said she did not know. The entire corridor is split into three pieces and could be completed in three sections as separate projects. Mr. Ham asked if the Town could request the study. Ms. Ingrish was not sure if that would be possible.

Mr. Ham said that he saw one comment on the survey stating that it is Matthews job to require additional property for this project. We should remind people that this an NCDOT project. Ms. Ingrish noted that there was the question if DOT could construct what they wanted to regardless of what the Town wanted. Her answer is theoretically yes, they could but if the Town keeps pushing back they will listen to the Town. Ms. Dement asked if the home owners at Greylock knew that the plan would be to connect that street across E. John Street. Ms. Ingrish stated that the connection would help them because it would provide a signalized intersection.

There was no further discussion on this issue.

ADJOURNMENT

Steve Lee made a motion to adjourn. David Pratt seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Jo Gollnitz
Zoning Technician/ Deputy Town Clerk