

The following are minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, March 30, 2023, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:01 P.M.

Commission Chairman Pierce called the meeting to order, and all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioners in attendance included John Pierce, Chad Hall, Mike Lanaux, Lex LeBlanc, and Bryan Gowland. Kristin Tortorich, Town Attorney Adam Davis, and Heather Hockman were also present.

CALL FOR AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no modifications to the agenda.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the February 23, 2023, meeting. Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to accept the minutes of the February 23, 2023, meeting. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All commissioners were in favor.

PLANNING

No items were on the agenda.

ZONING

Public Hearing

Commercial Conditional Use Permit Request for 21434 Highway 36

Kristin Tortorich gave a staff report.

Commissioners confirmed details of the application.

Stewart Eastman stated he thinks approval would mean we should throw out the ordinances. He feels the use should only be allowed in the Light Industrial Zone.

Commissioner Gowland said automotive repair shops should be approved. A Conditional Use Permit was granted next door to the proposed business location a couple of years ago. He also stated the positive part of the permit is that it gives the ability to revoke it if they violate the terms of the Conditional Use Permit.

Commissioner Hall said a filling station is in the center of town.

Commissioner Lanaux asked what the business is next door to the applicant location. Kristin Tortorich said it is Ace's Towing.

Judy Cazaux asked where the Light Industrial Zone exists and stated that Abita Springs needs business and tax dollars. Commissioner Gowland said Prats Road is where that zoning can be found.

E. J. Boudreaux stated that the business's clientele could potentially generate more business in Abita.

The applicant stated that he had already spoken with the owner of the building about getting neighboring businesses to spruce up their locations to improve the appearance of the area.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to close the Public Hearing. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Commissioner Gowland motioned to grant a Conditional Use Permit based on the conditions laid out by the applicant. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

DISCUSSION

Review Draft Amendment to Abita Springs Code of Ordinances:

-Short Term Rental Ordinance

Kristin Tortorich reviewed the draft changes to the Short-Term Rental Ordinance. She explained the proposed date change is to allow applicants time to get their Occupational License and other paperwork to have a completed application, and renewals could be handled administratively only if no complaints were filed in the previous 2 years. Ms. Tortorich also explained the possibility of requiring important safety information to be posted or displayed in a welcome binder inside the rental, such as the address, location of the nearest hospital, and other emergency contact information.

Commissioner Gowland asked why the number of Short-Term Rental Permits would potentially be increased when New Orleans is wrestling with issues surrounding the number of short-term rentals there.

Commission Chairman Pierce stated density and location of rentals is more of a concern for him than the overall number of permits issued. For example, ten rentals on a block is more complicated than ten throughout town.

Kristin Tortorich stated the option is being given whether the Commission wants to increase the number of permits and said that Staff is fine with their decision either way.

Commissioner Hall asked how to decide who gets the remaining permits beyond existing permits/renewals.

Commissioner LeBlanc stated he is alright with an increased quantity of permits, as long as the density is considered.

Commissioner Lanaux asked if the number of permits were increased now, could they be changed later? Kristin Tortorich confirmed that the number could be modified at a later date.

Commission Chairman Pierce asked if there could be an allowance for a variance on the number of permits. Kristin Tortorich confirmed there is an option for a variance, but it would have to be added into the ordinance.

Commission Chairman Pierce then asked about density of short-term rentals. Kristin Tortorich said all but one of the current short-term rental permits are in the Commercial Zone. She suggested a possible cap for residential area permits.

Commission Chairman Pierce then recapped the proposed changes.

1. All Commissioners are on board with administrative processing for renewals.
2. All Commissioners are agreeable with the safety and informational binder being added to the requirements.
3. Number of permits- Commissioner Pierce stated ten is working currently and asked the Commissioners how they felt about a variance option.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked what would happen if there were more than ten applications.

Commissioner Gowland said an amendment would be required to allow more than ten permits.

Kristin Tortorich said due to the Homestead Exemption ruling, it may allow for more people wanting to do short-term rentals. She said she will do research to explore the language for the ordinance to add an option for a variance or to address density in certain zones.

Public Comment

Stewart Eastman said he was at the original meetings when the ordinance was created, and he thinks the Town should “can the whole ordinance.”

Melanie Carwile said she felt the ordinance is important for the town to keep the number of permits capped.

Scotty Mac said he loves the area and thinks there are so many people that would enjoy being educated about the rich history of Abita. He said he thinks the Short-Term Rental Permits should be limited.

Commissioner Gowland explained that when he came to Abita Springs in 1969, the town only had about 600 people. He went on to say the Planning & Zoning Commission agonized over the details of the short-term rental ordinance when it was created in order to maintain the small-town feel. He stated commercialization and growth happens, but you must keep the small-town feel as you allow for growth.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Gowland announced that the Busker Festival will be held on Sunday, April 2nd from 11:30-7:00, and will have 18 or 19 food vendors. He also announced the Abita Springs Opry will be held on April 15th.

Kristin Tortorich announced there will be free Easter Bunny pictures held at the old Games Games store on Saturday, April 1st and the Bunny & Beignets event will be held at the Trailhead on Sunday April 2nd.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Gowland motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:45 P.M.

Kristin M. Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

Date