

The following are minutes from the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on Thursday, July 25, 2024, in Abita Springs Town Hall. The meeting convened at 6:02 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, Claire Guidry, and Lex LeBlanc. Commissioner Lanaux was absent. Staff members Kristin Tortorich, Mark Fancey, and Heather Hockman were also present along with Planners Alex Carter and Matt Wilson with Desire Line.

CALL FOR AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

Kristin Tortorich requested the first Discussion section item for the proposed revocation of property on St. Charles Street to be removed from the agenda due to the owner’s absence.

Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to remove the proposed revocation item from the agenda. Commission Vice Chairman Hall seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of removal.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the June 27, 2024, meeting.

Commissioner Guidry motioned to accept the minutes of the June 27, 2024, meeting as presented. Commissioner Hall seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

PLANNING & ZONING TRAINING

Alex Carter with Desire Line introduced the training as a way to prepare for the upcoming process as changes are considered and implemented as a result of the adopted Master Plan. Ms. Carter explained the basic regulatory tools include the Comprehensive Master Plan, Subdivision Regulations, Zoning Map, and the Code of Ordinances which all will help the Commission to make decisions on requests brought before them. Alex Carter explained the tools as follows:

1. Comprehensive Master Plan- A policy document that sets the long-term vision for the town.
2. Subdivision Regulations- A document that answers the questions on how to plan infrastructure to prepare for the building permit process.
3. Zoning Map- A lot level land use management tool for day-to-day activity which would ideally have a transition from less intense to more intense uses.
4. Code of Ordinances- The laws that apply and work in conjunction with the Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Map, a living document that will change.

Ms. Carter said when changes are made, the Master Plan should be reviewed to make sure the change is following the vision, as well as making sure the other tools are in alignment with the change.

Other key elements of the training are listed below:

Planning Commission: Subdivision Regulations are in the purview of the Planning Commission. Planning handles the infrastructure and plats, a plan for development.

Zoning Commission: Handles requests for the activities on a site, such as re-subdivisions and uses, and makes recommendations to the Town Council.

From Roberts Rules of Order/Details of a meeting:

1. Quorum- need at least 50% of the Commissioners present to hold a meeting
2. Public comment period- the public gets to be heard at every meeting for each item
3. Discussion- agenda items will be discussed

4. Some Examples of Motions:
 - a. Main motions such as opening or closing a Public Hearing
 - b. Approve
 - c. Approve with conditions
 - d. Deny
 - e. Amend
 - f. Table
 - g. Defer
 - h. Recess
 - i. Adjourn

3 Main Elements of Meeting Structure:

1. Standard Structural Items- Call to Order, Pledge, Roll Call, Acceptance of Minutes, Adjourn, etc.
2. Review of Agenda Items- reviewing each item listed
3. Public Hearing, Debate, and Action- item introduction, public commenters must give their name and where they live and are time limited, Commission debates and then takes an action

Amending an item:

The Commission could take an item that has a concern and make an amendment to that item without waiting a month to hear the item.

1. Motion with amendment
2. Discuss Amendment
3. Act on the Amendment- Withdraw, accept, etc,
4. Reinsert amendment back into the process
5. Go through the process of hearing the amended item to include new public comments
6. Motion, such as “approve as amended”

Table vs. Defer

Tabling an item: once an item is tabled, there must be a motion for it to be taken off the table to reintroduce the item, can remain tabled for multiple meetings

Deferring an item: automatically moves it to the next meeting

Agenda changes, such as adding or removing items, may be made by a unanimous vote for amending the agenda.

The Commission would send recommendations on major subdivisions to the Town Council due to the need to make decisions on infrastructure due to the budgetary elements with establishing and maintaining such a development.

PLANNING:

There were no items on the agenda.

ZONING:

PUBLIC HEARING

Amendment to the Town of Abita Springs, Code of Ordinances, Sec. 9-801 et seq, relative to Planned Unit Developments, and to provide for related matters

Commission Chairman Pierce introduced the item and said the Commission would be sending their recommendation to the Town Council about the repeal of the PUD ordinance, which was the result of discussions over many meetings.

Alex Carter explained there was a lot of debate about PUDs that came out of the Master Plan process and there was concern expressed about the unpredictability of and about the Administration's capacity to oversee and manage a Planned Unit Development. Ms. Carter explained after meeting with legal counsel, the recommendation is to repeal the PUD Ordinance, but there is language to allow the existing PUDs to remain without allowing new PUDs.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked what specific language would be used that makes it clear that this doesn't change the rules for the existing PUDs. Alex Carter said in the draft of the ordinance, page 2 lines 44-46 read "...Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning district be repealed and that such repeal shall not have a retroactive effect on existing PUDs in the Town." Ms. Carter explained that the Town will continue to manage the PUD as it was originally approved in accordance with the standards that are on the books as well as any development agreement that may be applicable. Chairman Pierce noted that it is also found later in the document.

Commission Chairman Pierce asked what the process would look like if there was a revision to be made in the future regarding the existing PUD? Alex Carter stated the development agreement freezes the standards in time, so the owners of the existing PUD and the Town would have to agree on changes to the development agreement in compliance with both local ordinances and the signed development agreement.

Commission Chairman Pierce opened and closed the Public Comment period, as there were no public comments.

Commissioner LeBlanc motioned to recommend repealing the PUD Ordinance. Commissioner Guidry seconded the motion.

Discussion ensued over the clarity of the language.

All voted in favor.

Ordinance No. 544

Potential Commercial Development at Longbranch Recovery & Wellness, 21516 Hwy 36, Developmental Permit for Longbranch

Dyani Robarge, an architect with Cicada, was present to answer any questions on behalf of Longbranch. Commission Chairman Pierce asked for clarification on the responsibility of the Commission in regard to this item. Kristin Tortorich explained the Commission was tasked with making a determination on the exception because the moratorium allows the P&Z Commission to grant an exception to the moratorium with a favorable report from the Planners and the Town Engineer. Ms. Tortorich said this is not a discussion item that would then move to a Public Hearing, as it only requires Commission approval. Ms. Tortorich said the Planners had given their approval, but the engineers were unable to initially give their approval, so they worked with Cicada to find an alternate solution for onsite sewer treatment. The application is now being resubmitted, the Commission can get any questions answered, and the Land Clearing Permit and the exception will be considered.

Ms. Robarge reviewed the site plan, pointing out the parking area having green screening along the street.

She then reviewed the tree removal plan showing only four trees to be removed. Ms. Robarge explained the Historic Commission asked to bump out the building in one direction, so the setback is eleven feet six inches, but seven feet at the bump out. She stated the building setback has been pushed back a few feet from the original plan. The parking area includes ADA parking and a turnaround space. Due to site constraints, they are looking for a flat space to add the onsite sewer. Ms. Robarge said that it would likely be on one side of the parking area or the other and after being treated, the discharge would go to the roadside ditch.

Commission Chairman Pierce mentioned the staff report was pretty detailed, and the onsite treatment is temporary until such time the connection can be made to the Town system once the capacity issue is resolved.

Commission Vice Chairman Hall stated he was unaware of any kind of temporary permit to be issued by DEQ. Commission Chairman Pierce said that the report required the treatment system to have all necessary DEQ and LDH approvals that a permanent system would have.

Commissioner Guidry said that an exception would allow for expansion now which is she felt was good for everyone.

Commission Chairman Pierce noted if the onsite treatment is visible from the street, the Historic Commission may want to see details on fencing.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked if the approvals had to be obtained prior to beginning building or if they were going to start building while they seek approval. Kristin Tortorich said that engineering must be approved prior to construction.

Commissioner Hall motioned to approve the request for an exception to the commercial development moratorium subject to the conditions included in the July 23, 2024, letter from John Catalanatto, PE, PMP. Commissioner Guidry seconded the motion.

Commission Chairman Pierce requested any public comment. There were no comments.

All voted in favor.

DISCUSSION

Looking Ahead: Desire Line presentation for future planning regarding changes to ordinances and zoning map

Alex Carter provided the following updates:

1. PUD Ordinance- Commission voted to recommend repeal to the Town Council. Town Council now makes the final decision.
2. Long-term Subdivision Regulation edits- Short-term amendments were adopted back in March, Planners are currently meeting with Fairway Engineering and drafting recommendations, Commission should expect to get recommendations to consider this fall. Items being considered for revision are reordering the section, clarifying additional definitions, updating road classifications, updating sewer standards, drainage and flood plain updates, contiguous lot regulations, performance bonds, and maintenance provisions.
3. Zoning Map- Planners are working on a staff report regarding consistency of the current zoning districts and Code before moving into rezoning
4. Commercial Historic District- Planners are working on recommendations to improve building design standards in the Commercial Historic District.

- 5. Zoning and Future Land Use Map- The map that was originally attached to the draft of the Master Plan was not adopted. A Future Land Use Map should be created based on the Master Plan, in addition to changes to the zoning map. The public and business owners will be engaged to discuss a proposed zoning map which that information can then be used to help create a more informed proposed zoning map to be brought to the Commission in the future.
- 6. Safe Streets For All Action Plan- Fairway Engineering and Desire Line are working together to develop a plan whose goal is to reduce roadway injuries and fatalities. Abita Springs was given \$315,000 in federal and local grants to develop the plan. April 2025 is the plan adoption timeline set by the federal entities. Data collection analysis is currently underway. The process includes public engagement, cost estimating, identifying areas for improvements and prioritization. This plan gives federal government an action plan of projects important to Abita Springs that future grant applications will pull from to implement changes.

Timeline highlights presented:

July- Safety Task Force and website creation

August- Community Meetings begin for Safe Streets, Zoning and Future Land Use Maps

September- Draft long-term Subdivision Regulation edits, Historic District map corrections and amendments

April 2025- Future Land Use Map adoption (could possibly be moved up depending on outcome of the community meetings)

Alex Carter said the focus will shift from Safe Streets to Zoning and the goal is to have everything complete with Safe Streets by April 2025.

Alex Carter said there is a survey that will be available on the website for community members to share their concerns and drop a pin on a map for problem areas that should be considered for the Safe Streets plan.

OPEN COMMENTS

Sandra Spranley asked if there was a specific subdivision being discussed or planned for. Alex Carter clarified that the Subdivision Regulations being discussed involve Code requirements and changes and are not about any specific subdivision to be developed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kristin Tortorich announced the Truck and Tractor Showcase would be held in September. Commissioners asked about the location. Details about the event can be found on the Town’s website.

Commissioner Hall asked about the timeline for the Level and Burvant Streets overlay project. Kristin Tortorich said she would need to get that information and email the answer.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Hall motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Guidry seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 P.M.

Kristin Tortorich, Planning & Zoning Director

Date