



CITY COUNCIL

Nominations & Appointments Committee

Monday, August 1, 2022
Meeting Report

Attendance: M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Cepeda-Freytiz (in person)

Others Attending: M. Smith, (in person), L. Olsen, R. Ridley, K. Miller, D. Martinez, I. Litvinov (electronically)

The meeting was called to order at 4:07 pm by Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz.

I. Interviews

- **Lee Olsen – reappointment – Planning Commission**

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz commented that it has been a long time since she has seen Mr. Olsen in person. Mr. Olsen agreed.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz apologized for not attending the MP3 meeting. She stated that she was travelling. Mr. Olsen noted the need to schedule an Event Committee meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned why Mr. Olsen was interested in continuing to serve on the Planning Commission. Mr. Olsen stated that he enjoys serving on the Planning Commission. He stated that there is more activity and developers from inside and outside the area are bringing projects forward. He stated that the Administration did a great job bringing on consultants during times of staff turnover. He stated that the Planning Commission will begin meeting two times per month, one as a work session, to streamline the formal meeting process. He stated that there are 12 – 15 projects on each agenda. He stated that the Planning Commission is very objective in their reviews and that they ensure that the projects are improving the community.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how the Planning Commission can be business friendly while still doing its due diligence. Mr. Olsen stated that the PA MPC defines the Zoning and Planning processes. He stated that the Planning Commission has realized that there isn't much difference between preliminary plans and final plans. He stated that staff reviews are necessary

but that the One Stop and workshop process should allow projects to move through the process more quickly. He stated that each project is unique and there are good interactions with the developers.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how Council can better support the Planning Commission. Mr. Olsen stated that developers realize that the City is business friendly. He stated that the City ensures that developers come to Planning Commission meetings prepared due to the use of the One Stop. He stated that the City must both enforce the regulations and help the process move forward as quickly as possible. He stated that the Planning Commission is moving in the right direction.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how to avoid delays and lost income for developers. Mr. Olsen stated that the Planning Commission needs to be more decisive as well as firm, fair and fast. He stated that the law determines the speed of the process if developers are willing to do the work required. He stated that the backing of staff and officials is helpful. He stated that the system is bulky and needs some streamlining.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the Planning Commission is able to make recommendations to Council to amend the processes. Mr. Olsen stated that they can make recommendations if they make time to do a thorough review. He suggested a Saturday session with Trades, Zoning, Planning, Fire Marshal, Property Maintenance, etc. He stated that Lancaster has addressed the reuse of the upper floors of their downtown buildings and suggested forming a task force to address that in Reading. He suggested looking at other municipalities to model their processes. He stated that when the Blighted Property Review Committee was forming they also looked at other municipalities. He stated that this task force can be an ad hoc committee.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz requested that Mr. Olsen organize this review and task force. Mr. Olsen stated that he would be glad to work on this task force. He stated that he loves to solve problems and improve processes. He expressed the belief that this would help the City. He stated that the City has great potential and the increased population needs a better environment.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how Mr. Olsen would handle a potential conflict of interest. Mr. Olsen stated that there have been a minimal number of times that he's had a conflict. He stated that he immediately declares the conflict and recuses himself from discussion and abstains from votes. He stated that this process has worked well.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that people have many roles to play.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz thanked Mr. Olsen for this time.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that some believe this form of government is flawed. She expressed the belief that with some tweaks the processes can improve. Mr. Olsen agreed. He

stated that Reading has good, dedicated people. He stated that he will have an outline of the work of the task force by the end of August to begin meeting this fall.

- **Rodney Ridley – appointment – Planning Commission**

Dr. Ridley requested that Mr. Olsen remain in the meeting because his comments will compliment Mr. Olsen's comments.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned why Dr. Ridley is interested in serving on the Planning Commission. Dr. Ridley stated that the Collegetowne project has sparked downtown development. He stated that others have asked him how Alvernia's project got through the process so quickly. He expressed the belief that there are many opportunities for improvement. He stated that he has worked with the City on many projects. He stated that he would bring a new set of eyes to the process and that students can help modernize processes.

Dr. Ridley stated that he was speaking with Mr. Abodalo about a "secret shopper" type project where students would go through the zoning and planning processes and determine how to make improvements. He stated that Mr. Abodalo suggested applying to the Planning Commission instead of doing the "secret shopper" project.

Dr. Ridley stated that he has reviewed many processes and made improvements – both large and small. He stated that he is currently working with Pottsville on a program for second level housing above retail. He expressed the belief that small developers can't wait six months to get their projects started. He again stated that he suggested working on the Planning process as an outsider but was encouraged to apply.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that a Collegetowne neighbor needs assistance and questioned if students could assist. Dr. Ridley stated that he has offered the services of students to the neighbor. He stated that momentum is growing downtown and stated that Alvernia is working on a restaurant project at 601 Penn St.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she had worked in 601 Penn St and the bones of a restaurant remain. Dr. Ridley stated that Alvernia is looking to have this building as its downtown cafeteria and that it will also be open to the public.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if Dr. Ridley had the necessary time to serve on the Planning Commission. Dr. Ridley stated that this is too important not to have time and he will make it a priority. He stated that he is learning to delegate and recently hired a graduate student to oversee redevelopment projects.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned what Dr. Ridley hoped to accomplish in his first three months as a Planning Commission member if he is appointed. Dr. Ridley stated that he would like to identify the issues with real data and then determine ways to make corrections and

improvements. He stated that most processes are in place for a reason and noted the need to keep good processes in place.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned how Dr. Ridley would handle a conflict of interest. Dr. Ridley stated that he would use the same process as Mr. Olsen. He stated that he is very comfortable recusing himself. He stated that he often tells his students that if they wouldn't want their actions broadcast on "60 Minutes" they shouldn't do them.

Mr. Olsen stated that he would like the Planning Commission to do planning and not just rubber stamp projects. He noted the need to offer solutions and suggestions. He stated that the Planning Commission currently has a good cross section of talent and experience. He noted his hope that the Planning Commission could do long-range planning.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the increase in rental units. She requested that the Planning Commission take a 10,000 foot level review of rental units to determine how many can be supported. She agreed with the need for a plan for the upper levels of downtown retail buildings.

Mr. Olsen stated that he has spoken with other professionals about upper level development. He stated that rather than thinking of each building as its own silo, the development should consider each level one unit, condo style, which would reduce the need for stairwells and elevators. He stated that the City would need to collaborate with banks to get funding for these types of projects. He suggested that he and Dr. Ridley work together on the task force.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Mr. Olsen noted the diversity of talent on the Planning Commission. She questioned if there was a missing skill. Mr. Olsen stated that there are two architects, one business owner and one state employee. He noted the need for additional design professionals – landscaping, civil, etc – to begin planning. He stated that consultants are not needed if the City already has the talent.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned how to recruit these professionals. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the City has much untapped talent. Mr. Olsen stated that the Planning Commission works with many of these professionals and can recruit. He stated that people should consider it a privilege to serve the City and be part of its future. He stated that he is honored to serve and takes the responsibility very seriously.

Dr. Ridley questioned the appointment process. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this Committee makes a recommendation to the full Council. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the Committee will make its determination in time for the August 8 Council agenda.

Mr. Olsen and Dr. Ridley disconnected from the meeting at this time.

II. Diversity Training for Board, Authority and Commission Members

Mr. Miller stated that he is working with the City's Webmaster to create a new training website. He stated that the Webmaster was concerned that the training component would overload the City's website. He stated that a website would allow the members to get trained more quickly. He stated that he has updated his Power Point presentation based on the Committee's comments at the last meeting.

Mr. Miller disconnected from the meeting at this time.

III. Next Meeting Date

Ms. Smith stated that she is on vacation for the next regularly scheduled meeting. She questioned if the Committee would like to meet or if they'd like a short break. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that they would like a short break.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz requested that Ms. Smith provide a list of non-residents currently serving on all BACs and a list of the positions that are difficult to fill.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:42 pm

Respectfully submitted by,
Shelly Smith,
Deputy City Clerk