

**BOROUGH OF GREEN TREE
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MAY 12, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Green Tree Planning Commission met on Wednesday, May 12, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via a Zoom virtual public meeting due to state and federal quarantine restrictions from due to COVID-19. The link to view the meeting and the agenda were publicized via the Green Tree website and posted on borough doors and municipal bulletin boards.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

James Turocy, Chair
Cheryl Bakin, Vice Chair
Firas Abdelahad
Rebecca Chembars
Al Erwin
Ed O'Donnell

Also Present:

Louis A. Casadei, P.E., Borough Engineer
Deborah N. Gawryla, Stenographer

Absent:

Robert McWilliams

HEARING OF THE CITIZENS

There was no one present who wished to be heard.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - Mr. Turocy

Mr. Turocy stated that Mrs. Bakin and Mr. O'Donnell would be meeting with Borough Manager Judy Miller on May 19th to discuss the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Turocy said that he had gotten the name of a contact person at the County to discuss the Comprehensive Plan.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

April 14, 2021

Motion:

Mr. Erwin made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Bakin, to approve the April 14, 2021 minutes as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

**REVIEW OF "PLANNING COMMISSION IN PENNSYLVANIA" AND THE
PENNSYLVANIA MUNICIPALITIES PLANNING CODE (MPC)**

Mr. Turocy stated that the MPC outlines the specific duties and powers of the Planning Commission in Article II, Section 209.1. He suggested that all members review this section. He read Section 209.1(a) as follows:

"(a) The planning agency shall at the request of the governing body have the power and shall be required to:

- (1) Prepare the comprehensive plan for the development of the municipality as set forth in this act, and present it for the consideration of the governing body.
- (2) Maintain and keep on file records of its action. All records and files of the planning agency shall be in the possession of the governing body."

Mr. Turocy stated that the word "shall" in this section indicates that it must be done as opposed to the wording the next section that that uses the word "may," i.e., "The planning agency at the request of the governing body may..."

Mr. Turocy said that creating the comprehensive plan is one of Planning Commission's duties and they are now moving forward with this duty by talking with the Borough Manager to start the process.

Mrs. Bakin said that Mackin Engineers were the consultants that were hired by the borough to work on the comprehensive plan in 2010. Mackin seemed to have a formulary on how they wrote comprehensive plans for municipalities. Mrs. Bakin said that since that was the first comprehensive plan the borough had undertaken no one was certain how the development should take place. Therefore, Mackin became the driving force in the plan's development, taking a lot of their direction from the Borough Manager and Council. There were different groups that were created during the development of the previous comprehensive plan, such as businesses, church groups, youth groups, etc. These groups were considered stakeholders in the comprehensive plan and the Planning Commission did not understand the process. Mrs. Bakin said that with the upcoming revision of the comprehensive plan there would be a much clearer understanding of what needs to be done and she did not feel that an outside consultant would be necessary.

Mr. Turocy said that although Council has the authority to appoint a consultant, it is not required in the MPC. Mrs. Bakin said that during the original creation of the comprehensive plan ten years ago, there was a separate committee of residents who volunteered and appointed to head up the comprehensive plan committee. This committee resulted in keeping Planning Commission on the sidelines. Even though Mrs. Bakin and Mr. O'Donnell were members of this separate committee and reported back to Planning Commission, she did not think they had a good handle on what was going on entirely. Mr. O'Donnell agreed. He said there were a lot of other people involved in the process. Mrs. Bakin said some of the committee members would attend one or two meetings and not come back. This time it would be important for Planning Commission to be in charge of the process. Mr. O'Donnell said that with an existing comprehensive plan he did not see the need for a consultant. Mrs. Bakin said that an attorney's assistance might be needed during the process though.

Mr. Turocy said the comprehensive plan is supposed to be a future vision of the development of the community. The definition of a comprehensive plan was "The official statement of the governing body's future planning goals, showing all the pieces of the community and how they work together to be used as a tool for evaluating proposed projects and a guide for future development." There are certain areas that must be included in a comprehensive plan and they are listed in the MPC, Article III, Section 301 including a statement of objectives, a land use plan, housing needs plan, transportation plan, community facilities plan, the interrelationship of components, implementation strategies, statement of compatibility, and a natural and historic resources plan.

Mrs. Bakin said that during the creation of the initial comprehensive plan there was input solicited from the members of the community regarding things they would like to see in the future. One member had suggested the addition of a band shelter for concerts and it turned out to be true with the borough's summer concerts. Bringing in various ideas encourages new ideas that can often help the community to grow. The state mandates that a comprehensive plan be reviewed and updated every ten years. Mr. Turocy said that once the plan has been reviewed and updated it must be sent to contiguous municipalities for review and comment, and then sent to the governing bodies, the county government, and the Center for Local Government Services for informational purposes.

Ms. Chembars asked if the borough had ever received any other neighboring communities' comprehensive plans. Mr. Turocy did not think they had. He said that another possibility was to create a multi-municipal comprehensive plan with a number of neighboring communities. Discussion continued regarding comprehensive plan regulations and its impact on neighboring communities and how Green Tree has changed and developed over the years.

Mrs. Bakin said that it had been difficult to get input from the school district and young people when the previous comprehensive plan was developed. She suggested that those entities be contacted and created near the beginning of the process to make sure they had a voice in the plan. Ms. Chembars suggested that a request for younger volunteers could go out in the weekly borough email to invite interested people. Mrs. Bakin said that could be done after Commission members discuss the comprehensive plan with the Borough Manager and touch base with Council to see how to proceed.

Mr. Erwin said he had recently reviewed the current comprehensive plan. He asked how well the plan has been followed in the past ten years. Mr. Casadei said he was not involved in the creation of the comprehensive plan and he did not think that the general public even knew it existed. He suggested that the upcoming review of the plan be put in the forefront so that more residents could become involved in it.

Mrs. Bakin said one of the primary recommendations in the comprehensive plan was the reworking of the zoning code, which took Planning Commission five years to complete with Council then reviewing it another couple of years. It was just approved by Council in 2020. The same slowness in the creation of the initial comprehensive plan occurred again when the zoning code was been rewritten. The zoning code saw a significant number of changes before it was finally approved. Discussion continued regarding the details involved in rewriting the zoning code.

Mr. Erwin asked if the Planning Commission might be able to review neighboring communities' comprehensive plans. Mrs. Bakin said she did not think they had ever reviewed other municipalities' comprehensive plans. Mr. Turocy said that comprehensive plans are public information and should be available. Mr. Casadei said the City of Pittsburgh has a lot of information regarding its comprehensive plan on their website and Scott Township worked with Heidelberg and Carnegie in 2012 on a multi-municipal comprehensive plan. He sent members links to several communities' comprehensive plans. Mrs. Bakin said that Dormont recently completed a rewrite of its comprehensive plan. Mr. Turocy suggested that members look at

those communities' plans and see if they can help with ideas on how to redesign Green Tree's comprehensive plan. Mr. Turocy said that the 2020 census data would also help determine how Green Tree has changed in the past ten years. Discussion continued regarding community changes over the years.

Mr. Casadei said that there are often grants available from DCED or the COGs for communities who do multi-municipal planning. Ms. Chembars said that the multi-municipal plans often contain information on walking or biking trails, exercise and walkability plans, etc. Mr. Erwin said that the current comprehensive plan refers to improving Nature Center trails. Mr. Casadei said that work was actually completed on a bike trail that goes down through Scott as well as the clearing of Nature Center trails. Mr. O'Donnell said that there are streets in Green Tree that can only be reached by traveling through Scott Township. Ms. Chembars said that would be a good reason to work with Scott. She said Planning Commission should look at Scott's plan and see where it might impact Green Tree.

Mr. Casadei said the borough belongs to an organization called CONNECT (Congress of Neighboring Communities), which includes the City of Pittsburgh and the communities that are suburbs to the city, providing coordination between neighboring areas. Mr. Casadei said he attends CONNECT's storm water and utility meetings and Council President Mark Sampogna attends the local government meetings. Discussion continued regarding various ways CONNECT helps local municipalities.

Ms. Chembars said that although Parkway Center Mall is in the City of Pittsburgh and has been sitting empty, it impacts Green Tree and should be something that should be discussed with the city. Mr. Casadei said most of the areas in Green Tree that touch other communities tend to be residential so there is not a lot of planning involved, but areas like Parkway Center should be coordinated with the city in a comprehensive plan. He felt issues, such as these, should be explored with the review of the next comprehensive plan. Mr. O'Donnell said that now that Green Tree has already completed a comprehensive plan, there is more experience and knowledge on how to proceed.

Mrs. Bakin said she still has a notebook from the current comprehensive plan that lists the stakeholder groups and the agendas. Discussion continued regarding how to begin the work for the revision of the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Turocy asked Mr. Erwin if he would be interested in attending the meeting with the Borough Manager, Mrs. Bakin and Mr. O'Donnell. He said he was interested and would try to attend once a time for the meeting had been established.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Casadei said he had an update regarding the status of two hotels in Green Tree. The DoubleTree Hotel was sold to another hotel group and that hotel will most likely be rebranded. Mr. Casadei said that the former Holiday Inn/Ramada Inn/Crowne Plaza/Pittsburgh Plaza hotel is seeking to convert the building into micro-apartments. They have held off on the closing of the property after realizing that borough ordinances would only permit 32 units in the building. Right now the hotel is vacant and plans are currently in a holding pattern although they would

like to turn the building into micro-apartments. Discussion continued regarding the hotels and housing in the borough.

Ms. Chembars asked when meetings would return to in-person meetings. Mr. Casadei replied that the borough is still not holding any in-person meetings and the meeting rooms in the Municipal Center are not open. Ms. Chembars said she would be returning to Green Tree on May 28th and be available through mid-October.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

Mr. O'Donnell made a motion, seconded by Ms. Chembars, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

James J. Turocy, Chairman

Ed O'Donnell, Secretary

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