

**BOROUGH OF GREEN TREE
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
JUNE 9, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Green Tree Planning Commission met on Wednesday, June 9, 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, Facebook, Twitter, and posted on municipal center bulletin boards.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

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

Also Present:

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

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, Mr. O'Donnell, and Mr. Erwin met with Borough Manager Judy Miller to discuss the revision of Green Tree's Comprehensive Plan. Mrs. Bakin said that Planning Commission received an email from Ms. Miller stating that at the June 6, 2021 Council meeting Council had discussed Planning Commission's request to begin reviewing the Comprehensive Plan and supported beginning the process.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

May 12, 2021

Motion:

Ms. Chembars made a motion, seconded by Mr. O'Donnell, to approve the May 12, 2021 minutes as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

**DISCUSSION: Proposed use for the former Holiday Inn/Ramada Inn/Crowne Plaza/
Pittsburgh Plaza at 401 Holiday Drive**

Mr. Casadei said that he, Ms. Miller (Borough Manager), Ms. Diersen (Borough Solicitor), and the developers interested in converting the hotel to micro-apartments along with their attorney, Mr. Irving Firman had met earlier today. They wish to take the hotel and convert it to approximately 200 micro-apartments. They said that the walls of the hotel cannot be removed to make larger individual apartments so each hotel room would become one micro-apartment. The developers said they had spoken to the previous Borough Manager about a year ago regarding this possibility, which may have been permitted under the old Zoning Code. They proceeded

with plans based upon that conversation until their mortgage company requested written approval from the Borough that their plans met the Borough's zoning regulations. They contacted the Borough and after a review of the Zoning Code they learned that the hotel is in the new Office Commercial District. The Office Commercial District permits Multi-Family Mid-Rise consisting of no more than four stories with no more than 32 units per building. Mr. Casadei said that the Use Table in the new Zoning Code only indicates "Multi-Family" as being permitted in the Office Commercial District.

Mr. Casadei asked Planning Commission to look at Section 420-28 in the new Zoning Code showing "Multi-Family" as a permitted use. The Solicitor indicated that the Use Table should be reviewed regarding this issue and any other confusing or undefined terms. She would have one of her interns also review the Use Table to see if they could find other issues that could arise.

Mr. Casadei said another item that came up during the discussion was the definition of "High Rise." The applicants had tried to imply that the Borough was being exclusionary because there was no district for high-rise multi-family in the Zoning Code. Ms. Diersen suggested that Planning Commission review the ordinance to include high-rise multi-family, so the Borough is not accused of being exclusionary in the future. Mr. Casadei said that if the developers were permitted to allow over 200 units in the hotel it could potentially result in that number being multiplied to allow 200 residential units in every building in Foster Plaza. That could create an increase in residents that could not be handled by the Borough's infrastructure, roads, and traffic.

Mr. Casadei said that the applicants had requested to attend the July Council meeting to attempt to get answers from Council regarding these issues. Mr. Turocy asked about zoning height restrictions. Mr. Casadei said that the height restriction in Office Commercial is about 75 feet, which the hotel meets, but that height restriction is not the same in a residential district. Multi-family is limited to four stories with 32 units.

Mrs. Bakin said that there were no apartments more than four stories in the Borough when the Zoning Code review took place and no one was considering the conversion of a hotel into apartments. Mr. Casadei said the issue of density had been discussed and they referenced the density of the Terrain Apartments down the road. The Terrain Apartments were formerly hotel units that had been converted into apartments and this was permitted under the old Zoning Code. Mr. Casadei said there was the possibility that the developers could fight the Borough by stating that the Borough was being exclusionary because it did not allow high density. He said Planning Commission must look at the Zoning Code again to determine where it should be included. The hotel is located in the Office Commercial District in the new Zoning Code. The number of districts were reduced in the new Zoning Code resulting in areas formerly in different zoning districts to be put together in the same district.

The zoning map from the new Zoning Code was displayed for Planning Commission to review. Mr. Casadei said the Parkway Center Holiday Inn had already contacted the Borough a while ago to see if the hotel could be converted into apartments. Mr. Casadei said they were told they could not turn that hotel into apartments at that time, but now that hotel is in the same district as the hotel on Holiday Drive and that could possibly allow the Parkway Center Holiday Inn to be converted into apartments too. Discussion continued regarding possible locations that could permit high-density multi-family housing.

Mr. Casadei said there are references to Dwelling - Multi-Family Duplex, Dwelling - Multi-Family Garden, etc., but a general Multi-Family does not exist in the code. He believed that it was a mistake or oversight. Mrs. Bakin said this issue had been revised and discussed extensively by Planning Commission. Mr. Turocy suggested that this might have been revised during Council's review of the code although there were things in the proposed Zoning Code that might need to be tweaked or might have been missed. She felt that Planning Commission should go back through the Zoning Code to see if any other oversights might exist. Mr. Casadei said he had a short list to begin with for a review. Another oversight seems to be a lack of a definition for "boarding home," which is a permitted use in a district. Mrs. Bakin said that had been discussed by Planning Commission, but must have been omitted during Council's review.

Mr. Casadei said that Ms. Diersen had provided him with several immediate issues that she had spotted: No definition for Boarding House, High-Rise Multi-Family, a single use on each lot, and Air BnB. Mr. Casadei said it would be difficult to determine setbacks if there was more than one use on a lot. Ms. Diersen indicated that she would provide some ordinances from other communities regarding how they zoned Air BnBs. Discussion continued regarding Air BnBs.

Ms. Chembars said the 2015 draft of the Zoning Code included boarding house, but seems to have been removed during later reviews. Mr. Casadei said boarding house still exists in the Use Table, but there is no definition for it. Mr. Casadei said he was aware that Planning Commission had reviewed these issues carefully, but additional changes and revisions were made in the two years after the draft was sent on to Council. Items may have been changed resulting in errors.

Mr. Casadei said that since Planning Commission had spent the most time on the new Zoning Code he felt that they should be the ones to review it again to find the issues and errors. Mrs. Bakin said that new issues like Air BnB did not exist during Planning Commission's review, but arose much later as a result of a resident requesting for zoning for it. Mrs. Bakin said that the Zoning Code is not a permanent document, but can be revised and updated as needed. Discussion and review of the Use Table continued.

Mr. Abdelahad asked if the applicants were applying to convert the hotel into a mid-rise apartment building. Mr. Casadei replied that the building is only four stories, so the height restrictions are met for a mid-rise apartment building, but only 32 units are permitted within the four floors. The developers are seeking to have over 200 units in the building. Review of the height and length restrictions continued.

Mrs. Bakin asked what the developers planned to do with the rooms on the first floor of the hotel that had always been banquet, restaurant, and meeting spaces. Mr. Casadei did not think they had gotten that far with their plans. Their plan would convert the building to micro-apartments since they cannot demolish walls in the structure to create larger apartments. Each individual hotel room would become a micro-apartment. Mr. Casadei said there are also minimum requirements for living spaces so the micro-apartments might not meet those requirements.

When asked, Mr. Casadei thought there were currently 212 hotel rooms. Mr. Abdelahad said if they were able to cut a doorway between two hotel rooms, there could be sufficient space for one apartment, but that would still result in more apartments than permitted. Discussion continued regarding apartment designs in the borough.

Mr. Casadei said that Planning Commission should consider reviewing the Zoning Code for discrepancies or other problems before another zoning issue arises. Mr. Casadei said he would contact the Solicitor to come up with a list of items to address to start the process. He hoped it was something Planning Commission could work on soon without putting the review of the Comprehensive Plan on the back burner. Mr. Casadei said he should have more information after the developers meet with Council in July. Mrs. Bakin said if it was just an issue of reviewing a few sections for missed definitions or inclusions in the Use Table it should not be a difficult task. When asked, Mr. Casadei said the Solicitor was recommending the addition of high-rise, multi-family as a use to alleviate future issues, possibly as an overlay district that could be a conditional use issue. Mr. Casadei said that since real estate prices have been increasing, apartments have been hot items. Mr. Turocy said Planning Commission would wait to hear from the Solicitor regarding more detailed items to review in the Zoning Code.

DISCUSSION: Comprehensive Plan

Mr. Turocy said that Mrs. Bakin, Mr. O'Donnell, and Mr. Erwin met with Ms. Judy Miller to discuss the review of the Comprehensive Plan. He asked for them to provide a summary of what had been discussed at the meeting.

Mr. O'Donnell felt that meeting had gone quite well. Ms. Miller indicated that she would help Planning Commission in any way. Mr. Erwin said Ms. Miller was interested in what Planning Commission was proposing to undertake with the Comprehensive Plan and she expressed willingness to work with Council to get approval to proceed with the review. Mr. Erwin said that she is fairly new to the process as well so there was a lot of information exchanged and it was a good learning experience for both him and Ms. Miller. Mrs. Bakin said it appears that Ms. Miller took Planning Commission's request to Council and got it approved quickly.

Mr. Turocy said that Ms. Miller's email to Planning Commission indicated that she was willing to provide assistance as needed. Mr. Turocy said he attended Monday's Council meeting and Council appeared to be receptive to Planning Commission beginning the review. They understand that Planning Commission wishes to take the lead on this review, but are also willing to consider any future requests for outside help as well. Discussion continued regarding the company that consulted on the development of the current Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Erwin said he had heard that the previous consultant had dictated a lot of the information that went into the plan. Mrs. Bakin said that was correct and during the development of the Comprehensive Plan members of the committee each had assignments to work on and anticipated that the process would take seven to ten months to complete. However, it took well over a year to complete the Comprehensive Plan. Mrs. Bakin felt that the development of the Comprehensive Plan had been poorly organized on Green Tree Borough's part with too many participants and contributors not knowing what other groups were working on.

Mr. O'Donnell said the development of the Comprehensive Plan was the first one ever done by Green Tree Borough and it was started from scratch. However, Planning Commission now has a starting document to work with and revise as needed. He felt that the revision should not take as much time as the original Comprehensive Plan had taken.

Mr. Turocy said that Local Government Academy (LGA) has a number of good resources regarding comprehensive plans. There is a video on LGA's website that could be reviewed and

he suggested that Planning Commission watch this video at the next in-person meeting. The video is called The Implementable Comprehensive Plan. There is another video that is available that was available for a fee called Creating An Implementable Comprehensive Plan. These videos could help Planning Commission develop a guide regarding the direction of where to begin and provide information on the basics for development of the next Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Turocy asked that each Planning Commission member receive a hard copy of the current Comprehensive Plan, which would be easier to reference and review at meetings. Mr. Casadei said he would make sure that each member receives a copy of the Comprehensive Plan before the next meeting.

Mr. Turocy said that Council had decided to restart in-person meetings in July and he felt that Planning Commission could also meet in person starting in July. Mrs. Bakin said she would be unable to attend next month's meeting.

Mr. Erwin suggested that when focus groups are needed they should be requested through the borough's website or newsletter. Ms. Chembars said Planning Commission should come up with a timeline regarding the development and revision of the plan and determine how long they should spend on this project. Mr. Turocy said that Mrs. Bakin and Mr. O'Donnell have the most experience in the development of the Comprehensive Plan since they were part of creation of the original plan. Mr. Turocy said Planning Commission should watch either one or both of the videos he mentioned, then discuss a timeline for the development of the Comprehensive Plan including a list of potential stakeholders that the Commission might want to reach out to via the borough's website, newsletter, and weekly emails.

Mrs. Bakin said that she and Mr. O'Donnell could create a list of potential stakeholders to be considered using lists from the previous plan. The original plan could be used as a road map to determine what was done last time.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

Mr. Erwin made a motion, seconded by Ms. Chembars, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

James J. Turocy, Chairman

Ed O'Donnell, Secretary