

Gastonia Planning Commission
March 7, 2019 Minutes

Vice-Chairperson Bob Cinq-Mars declared a quorum and the Gastonia Planning Commission meeting opened at 5:31 pm on Thursday, March 7, 2019, in the Council Chamber at City Hall.

Present: Commissioners Jerry Fleeman, Pamela Goode, Bob Cinq-Mars, Jim Stewart, Rodney Armstrong, Mark Epstein, and Kristie Ferguson

Absent: Commissioner Bob Biggerstaff

Staff Members Present: Charles Graham, Assistant City Attorney; Jason Thompson, AICP, Planning Director; Jana McMakin, AICP, Senior Planner; and Chrystal Howard, Secretary

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

Commissioners stated there were no contacts.

Item 1c: Approval of corrected March 7, 2019 Agenda

Commissioner Fleeman made the motion to approve the corrected March 7, 2019 agenda as presented and Commissioner Stewart seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (6-0).

Item 1c: Approval of February 7, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Fleeman made the motion to approve the February 7, 2019 minutes as written and Commissioner Stewart seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved (6-0).

Chairperson Goode arrived at 5:33 p.m. and was recognized at this time.

Item 2: Public Hearing – Amending the Unified Development Ordinance (File # 9189)

Subject hearing involves a request to amend Table 7.1-1 Table of Uses and 7.3-1 Bulk and Use Chart, add a new subsection Section 8.1.17 Dwelling, Single Family, Attached, and amend Chapter 13 Subdivisions to the Unified Development Ordinance to provide clear standards for single-family attached uses.

This item will be heard by the City Council on Thursday, March 19, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Public Forum Room at the Gaston County Courthouse.

Vice-Chairperson Cinq-Mars opened the public hearing and recognized Jason Thompson, AICP, Planning Director for the purpose of staff presentation.

Mr. Thompson provided a brief update on residential standard development discussions.

Mr. Thompson explained that the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) does not currently have standards for single family attached dwellings (townhomes) and this package of proposed amendments would put in place provisions for accommodating single family attached developments in the UDO. In an effort to be business friendly and make the ordinance work as it should, staff would like to move forward with an amendment approval prior to the residential developments discussion. Staff has had increased interest in townhome development; therefore, staff has prepared these amendments drawing from existing Planned Residential Development standards as well as the residential standards draft prepared by Metrocology.

Mr. Thompson briefly explained townhomes, condos and apartments and gave examples. Discussion ensued between Commissioner Cinq-Mars and Mr. Thompson clarifying townhomes, condos and apartments. Commissioner Cinq-Mars asked Mr. Thompson if he foresees in Gastonia having four or five story apartment building blocks as seen in Charlotte and asked if it would be covered. Mr. Thompson replied, “Yes” to both inquiries.

Mr. Thompson summarized the amended Table 7.1-1 Table of Uses and Table 7.3-1 Bulk and Use Chart of the Unified Development Ordinance as presented in the agenda on page 2-2.

Brief discussion ensued on living space with land and mixed use buildings with retail or office on the ground level and residential units on the upper level. Mr. Thompson stated mixed use was covered in the UDO.

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Mr. Thompson continued by briefly summarizing the proposed new subsection 8.1.17 Dwelling, Single Family, Attached to list all of the supplemental regulations for a single family attached development including setbacks, buffers, parking, and common open space. The proposed amendments also include removing a duplicate requirement in Chapter 13 Subdivisions that is already in Chapter 9 General Provisions. The amendments would continue to allow single family attached developments in several zoning districts either by right with new supplemental regulations or by a conditional zoning district. These amendments will bring clarification and address the current gaps in the UDO regarding townhomes. Based on the strong interest staff has received on development, including townhomes, these amendments pull from residential standards draft and allow City to be in a better position to review these pending developments.

Commissioner Epstein commented on limitations in terms of architectural standards and requested confirmation that this does not violate North Carolina law and if it does not, he asked if the city could have more architectural standards. Mr. Thompson commented that this limitation under state legislation on the ability to control design and materials applies to single family detached and duplexes, but nothing else. Attorney Graham briefly explained how it has been interpreted in courts. Based on municipality's interest, infrastructure, and public safety, he suggested looking at it as what can we do and justify it based on those grounds. Mr. Thompson commented how he understood the legislation, and explained that staff could work with developers through the conditional rezoning process and ask them to agree to architectural standards and other types of conditions. Mr. Thompson and Ms. McMakin provided examples.

Commissioner Fleeman was concerned about 8.1.17.B.4 and being able to have the technique slab on grade and not mandating a crawlspace. Mr. Thompson replied that if the requirement can be achieved there would be nothing to enforce requiring a crawlspace. This would also relate to the city's grading policy. Mr. Thompson was unaware of building codes with different scenarios.

Ms. McMakin briefly explained 8.1.17.A.2. Project Lot Width and Project Boundary Buffers.

Commissioner Epstein made a motion to recommend approval of the request as presented and Commissioner Ferguson seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved 7-0.

Item 3: Other Business

Mr. Thompson stated he did not have any updates on Council Votes.

File #9189 will be heard by the City Council on Thursday, March 19, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Public Forum Room at the Gaston County Courthouse and Mr. Thompson suggested it may be beneficial to have a representative at this City Council Meeting. Commissioner Epstein encouraged someone to attend and provided a statement. Mr. Thompson stated staff will relay Commissioner Epstein's statement if no one was available to attend.

Mr. Thompson recognized commissioners that have expiring terms this year. Commissioners with expiring terms expressed their willingness to serve another term. Mr. Thompson reminded the commission that City Council shall also designate one of the commissioners Chairperson and one as Vice-Chairperson. Commissioner Epstein made a motion to recommend Vice-Chairperson Cinq-Mars as designated Chairperson and Commissioner Ferguson as designated Vice-Chairperson. Commissioner Stewart seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously approved 7-0.

Mr. Thompson informed the commissioners of a new employee in the Planning Department, Ms. Jane Love, Senior Planner. She is part of the Transportation Planning staff and briefly explained her experience.

There being no further business, Vice-Chairperson Cinq-Mars adjourned the meeting at 6:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

Pam Goode, Chairperson