

## **MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION**

**Wednesday, July 15, 2009**

**Downing- Gross Cultural Arts Center**

**2410 Wickham Avenue**

**Newport News, Virginia**

**PRESENT:** Sharyn Fox, Vice-Chairman; V. Albea; R. George Hubbard; Cleon Long; Wesley Maxwell; Clara Swanson; (Staff: Al Riutort, Director of Planning; Sheila W. McAllister, Assistant Director of Planning; Johnnie Davis, Planner-Planning Services; Lynn Sugg, Deputy Assistant City Attorney; Florence Kingston, Director of Development; Sandy Hitchens, Planning Technician; Dedra Richardson, Senior Coordinator, Interim)

**ABSENT:** Doug Coenen; H. Eugene Roberts; and Lucille Lowery.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The Chairman called the work session to order at 6:00 P.M.

### **WORK SESSION**

Ms. Fox welcomed the citizens to the presentation of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor Study presented by Mr. Mountjoy from Chan Krieger Sieniewicz consultants. She stated that this portion of the study includes Jefferson Avenue from 25<sup>th</sup> Street to 36<sup>th</sup> Street and recommends improvements that the City feels will provide an attractive environment in the Southeast Community. She informed the citizens that there would be a question and answer session after the presentation.

Mr. Mountjoy presented the Jefferson Avenue Study (copy attached to record minutes).

Ms. Fox reminded the citizens that the public hearing would be held at the Planning Commission meeting of August 5, 2009 and City Council on September 8, 2009. She asked the citizens to state their name and address for the records.

Ms. Fox opened the floor for questions.

Ms. Sheryl Abbott, 1604 Orcutt Avenue, asked if there were any height restrictions required by the city or federal government because of the airways. Mr. Mountjoy replied that height restrictions had not been addressed. Mr. Riutort replied that existing commercial zones, C1 and C2, have height restrictions. Mr. Mountjoy stated that height restrictions had not been changed and none of the illustrations shown were over three stories. Ms. Abbott asked, why only three stories. Mr. Mountjoy replied that this type of construction is called stick construction and tops out at three to four stories. Given the economics of the neighborhood that is what will be seen for the next 10 years.

Mr. Riutort asked Angela if the Overlay gives flexibility in height. Ms. McAllister replied that she thought the overlay takes away the underlying requirements.

Mr. Hubbard stated that unlike other cities that are built on rock, Newport News is built on mud and to build tall buildings the piles would need to be deep and that is rather expensive.

Ms. Liz Taylor 215 Eastfield Court stated that she owns a building downtown on Jefferson Avenue. When does the City expect to start with the new construction and how much this would cost the property owners in order to participate. Ms. Florence Kingston, Director of Development, stated once the community supports the recommendations of the Planning Commission to the City Council for adoption, the first thing would be to work with the Engineering Department to develop a utility alternative. This would be in the zero to five year time frame. The existing property owners are not expected to participate financially. Ms. Taylor asked if the City would help with replacing the façade on the front of her building. Ms Kingston replied that the City would not, but if you are interested in making improvements, there are grant /loan combinations through Newport News Redevelopment Housing Authority (NNRHA) you can apply for.

Dr. Saundra Cherry, 646 30<sup>th</sup> Street stated that it was time for improvements in this area. She is looking forward to the Planning Commission recommending this plan for adoption.

Mr. Kenny Hargrove, Jr. 742 20<sup>th</sup> Street, asked if the City was going to help the existing property owners and the churches with improvements or will the City force those property owners out. Mr. Mountjoy replied that he believed there were programs in place to help redesign. Mr. Riutort stated that the City did not have a program, but were looking into developing one. Ms. Kingston stated that the City has to deal with the reality of separation of church and state. Mr. Riutort stated the City is looking at a design center program like the city of Norfolk has, which is a good program, to give the community ideas and ways to redesign.

Ms. Artistine Reid, 1043 25<sup>th</sup> Street, stated her concerns about the maintenance of 25<sup>th</sup> Street past the Downing-Gross Cultural Arts Center. She stated that there should be more thought about store front shops, where people would be more inclined to open new businesses. Richmond and other areas have this type of mixed use neighborhoods. She believes that this type of use would be an upgrade for the area.

Mr. Ward Scull, 810 48<sup>th</sup> Street, asked if the City was going to hire someone to oversee this project like the Southeast Community project. Mr. Riutort replied that the City Manager suggested the Steering Committee to include representatives of the Planning Commission, Industrial Development Authority (IDA) / Economic Development Authority (EDA), Newport News Redevelopment Housing Authority (NNRHA) and the City Council to oversee these projects. City Council has talked about hiring a high level person to coordinate all the activities. Ms. Kingston stated the reality is there is more responsibility

for city Staff than hours in the day. The City needs someone that can oversee the project, but still pull from other City departments.

Karl Sherwood, P.O. Box, 5071, asked in past history with other cities and studies, what is the success rate with Chan Krieger Sieniewicz. Mr. Mountjoy replied that most of Chan Krieger Sieniewicz projects were very successful, it depends on what the City wants to put into the project, and it takes commitment for the City to be successful.

Ms. Taylor stated her concerns about more entertainment and shops to bring people to the downtown area, the only thing there now, is the Boys and Girls club. The City needs to consider this type of upgrade as well and not just streetscaping. Ms. Fox replied that, that is where the City is going with the Southeast Corridor. This is a long term process. With the plans and studies, we are going to see some things happen. She reminded the public again of the City Planning Commission meeting of August 5, 2009 and that the study goes to the City Council meeting of September 8, 2009 for adoption.

Mr. Riutort stated that if anyone would like a copy of this study you can call Angela Hopkins at 926-8077.

There being no further business, the work session adjourned at 7:04 P.M.

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Recording Secretary

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Executive Secretary