

The Town of Summerville Planning Commission Meeting
Minutes
September 16, 2019

This meeting of the Town of Summerville Planning Commission was attended by Commission Members, Jim Reaves, Chairman; Sarah Bares; Betty Profit; Elaine Segelken; and Kevin Carroll. Staff in attendance included Jessi Shuler, Director of Planning; Tim Macholl, Zoning Administrator; Michael Lisle, Economic Development Coordinator; and Bonnie Miley, Assistant Town Engineer.

Jim Reaves, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Approval of Minutes:

The Chairman asked if there were any edits or additions to the minutes from the meeting on August 19, 2019. Hearing none, the Chairman declared the minutes accepted as presented.

Public Hearings:

The first public hearing opened at 4:02 PM and was for Article VI, Summerville Economic Development Incentive Program proposed to be added to Town Code, Chapter 20, Planning and Development. Mr. Reaves introduced the request, and Mr. Lisle presented the proposed ordinance. He stated that the ordinance was planned for first reading by Town Council in October and the purpose is to create a program to encourage commercial investment in the Town, particularly in the areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan and Vision Plan. Mr. Lisle briefly detailed how the program would work, explaining that staff would work with the developer to craft an incentive agreement to be approved by Council. He stressed that any incentive given could not exceed the benefit to the Town, and the proposed development must meet certain qualifications to be eligible, including being consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, Vision Plan, or other future master plan; located within Town limits; meeting a minimum threshold of \$500,000 investment of which at least 50% must be in property improvements; and falling under at least one of the economic development activities identified in the ordinance. This program will be looking for proposals that not only improve the individual property, but also improve the adjacent properties and areas as a whole. Each incentive agreement could last up to five years, and staff would monitor annually to make sure that the development is meeting the deliverables included in the agreement. Dr. Bares asked for a Point of Information, which Mr. Reaves allowed. Dr. Bares asked how handing public money to a private developer is consistent with any of our plans. Mr. Lisle responded that this would stimulate the type of development that our plans consider and desire. He also noted that we are one of the few municipalities in our state that do not offer any type of development incentives, and this proposed ordinance is consistent with what other municipalities in our state are doing to stimulate economic development. Dr. Bares questioned the inclusion of restaurants, and not manufacturing, because she is concerned that this is not in line with any of the goals included in our Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Lisle explained that only full-service restaurants could qualify for the incentive and noted that defining the different economic development activities for qualification would be part of the approval process. He also agreed that manufacturing could be added as a specific activity. Dr. Bares remarked that she was also concerned about the level of staffing required for implementation of the ordinance, and Mr. Lisle confirmed that as the Economic Development Coordinator, he would be responsible for implementation of the ordinance, and he did not anticipate a large volume of projects that would overwhelm his ability to adequately implement the ordinance. Dr. Bares then questioned how projects would be decided upon in a way that would prohibit lawsuits against the Town given the broad nature of the ordinance. Mr. Lisle acknowledged that there is not a way to prevent lawsuits, but this ordinance is consistent with other municipalities in the state. Mr. Carroll asked for clarification on whether this proposes incentive money to the developer or tax rebates, and Mr. Lisle stressed that this is post-delivery incentives, nothing in advance. Ms. Segelken asked how staff would quantify the amount justified. Mr.

Lisle stated that it would be on a case-by-case basis, looking at the investment being made, the type of improvement being proposed, and the long-term benefits of the improvement, including increases in property taxes for the property and increases in property values of the surrounding area, types and wages of the jobs produced, and yearly check-ins would ensure that the purposes for which the incentives were being given are being met. He emphasized that flexibility would be in the agreement to reduce the incentives given or end the agreement entirely if the agreed upon commitments are not being met. Ms. Segelken agreed with Dr. Bares that she would have a problem with including restaurants because she does not see them as economic stimulators, particularly because of the wages provided for restaurant jobs. Mr. Lisle stated that most restaurants would not be able to meet the minimum \$500,000 investment requirements, as only up to \$250,000 can be counted for the cost of land. Mr. Reaves asked if anyone from the public had any comments.

Peter Gorman of 313 S. Magnolia Street questioned the inclusion of full-service restaurants. He compared this proposed ordinance to the public-private partnership on the boutique hotel project, and expressed his belief that government should not be competing with private businesses. Mr. Gorman stated that experiences in other towns have shown that the benefits are often not tracked, complex variables come into the calculation, and often these businesses will fail once they have to pay the full taxes. He noted that the existing Summerville Redevelopment Corporation already in place could have pursued these types of incentives and more, but it has not done so in four years. He urged the Commission to table the proposed ordinance as the Town is currently updating their Comprehensive Plan, and refer it to the staff, Comprehensive Plan consultants, and Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee to consider first.

Hearing no further comment, the public hearing was closed at 4:18 PM.

Old Business

There were no items under Old Business.

New Business:

The first item under New Business was New Street Names (as applicable). Ms. Shuler explained that they did not have any street names for approval.

The second item under New Business was the Article VI, Summerville Economic Development Incentive Program proposed to be added to Town Code, Chapter 20, Planning and Development. Mr. Reaves introduced the request. Ms. Segelken made a motion to reject the ordinance as submitted, and Dr. Bares made the second. Dr. Bares expressed her belief that the ordinance was too vague and left the Town open to being sued and wasn't in line with the Comprehensive Plan. She described what she believed to be a similar program in Jackson, MS, that targeted a specific redevelopment area, and the city ended up losing \$21,000,000. Ms. Segelken clarified that the Town's proposed ordinance would not give the money to start with, but only after agreed upon improvements are made; however, she stated that she was not completely comfortable with the current wording of the ordinance. She also explained that she would be interested in how the Chamber feels about the proposed ordinance. Rita Berry and Kevin Szostak, both representing the Chamber in the audience, explained that they had not had a chance to review it and could not comment at this time. Ms. Segelken feels that more research and time needs to be given to review of this proposed program. Following further discussion about the possibility of tabling the item, Dr. Bares made a motion to table the item until the next meeting, and Ms. Segelken made the second. Mr. Reaves called for the vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

The third item under New Business was the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) 2019 Improvement Priority List. Mr. Reaves introduced the request, and Dr. Bares, who also serves on the BPAC, acknowledged the work of Rick Reiff on the BPAC, whose expertise as a traffic engineer made the details included in the list possible along with Ms. Miley. Mr. Reaves agreed and commended the

BPAC on their effort and work; however, he stated that he was concerned about the identified projects not being in order of priority if it is sent on to Council. Dr. Bares and Ms. Miley agreed that it could be reordered prior to being sent on to Council. Mr. Carroll questioned the tan shading on certain items and asked what a bulb-out is. Ms. Miley explained that the tan shading represented items added this year, and Ms. Shuler provided a definition and example of a bulb-out. Ms. Segelken made a motion to endorse this list and send it on to Council in order of priority, and Mr. Carroll made the second. The motion passed unanimously.

Miscellaneous:

Ms. Shuler stated that she did not have any updates at this time, except that Carly Petersen, the main contact person for the consultant, is leaving Houseal Lavigne, so John Houseal, who is one of the principals of the firm, will take over in the lead contact position. She explained that Mr. Houseal was at the opening meeting with the Town, and has been involved in all communications with the consultant. Mr. Reaves asked for an update on the timeline of the project, and Ms. Shuler confirmed that it was still running close to the original timeline, and she hoped to have a completed draft by the end of the year.

Adjourn

With no further business for the Commission, Mr. Carroll made a motion to adjourn with Ms. Segelken making the second, and Mr. Reaves adjourned the meeting at 4:36 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jessi Shuler
Director of Planning

Date: October 21, 2019

Approved: 
Jim Reaves, Chairman or Elaine Segelken, Vice Chairman