

Minutes



PLANNING BOARD

Regular meeting

6:30 p.m. June 15, 2023

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.

Present Chair Frank Casadonte, Vice Chair Hooper Schultz, members Cassandra Chandler, Robert Iglesias, Sherra Lawrence, Saru Salvi

Absent: John Giglia, Alyse Polly

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell, Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood

1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

Campbell confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Motion: Vice Chair Hooper Schultz moved to make no changes. Member Cassandra Chandler seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

None.

4. Discussion Items

- A. Open House for South Churton Street Multimodal Corridor Study: Discuss issues and opportunities for improvements in the corridor especially relating to bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety.

Public Space and Sustainability Manager Stephanie Trueblood, the project manager for the study, thanked the board for hosting the open house, explained the format for the discussion, and shared background information about the study. She explained that years ago the North Carolina Department of Transportation proposed a bypass around downtown using Elizabeth Brady Road, which was intended to route traffic off South Churton Street and around downtown. Because of potential impacts on recreation and conservation areas, the Hillsborough Board of Commissioners did not support the bypass. About 10 years ago the town commissioners asked staff to look for alternative ways to relieve congestion on South Churton Street and to make it safer not just for drivers and vehicles but also pedestrians and bicyclists.

Member Salvi arrived at 6:37.

Trueblood said that in 2019 the town received plans from NCDOT to widen South Churton Street that included a 22-foot median, 12-foot lanes, and utility strips and sidewalks that took up all of the right of way. Staff had concerns about how that project would impact local businesses and whether it would relieve congestion. Town commissioners chose not to support that design and directed staff to ask NCDOT for more time to

conduct its own study to gather input from the local community that would inform a design that was more in scale with Hillsborough and that also relieved congestion and provided safe options for pedestrians and bicyclists. The town hired the consulting firm Stantec to help develop an early concept design and prepare a proposal to submit to NCDOT. The project is funded, she said, but not scheduled until 2031.

Mike Rutkowski, planner and engineer with Stantec, introduced himself and Amber Lewis, an urban designer. He said the study would take about 12 months to complete. Through a series of polling questions, the consultants then asked for and received input from the board and other participants on priorities to help determine amenities to include in the redesign concept.

Asked why NCDOT wants to widen South Churton Street, Trueblood explained that the corridor had a higher rate of accidents than the state average and that traffic forecasts for 2040 and 2050 showed a failing level of service. Following its "Complete Streets" policy, the state was trying to incorporate multiple modes of transportation, make the corridor safer, and improve traffic flow. She said that because South Churton Street is a state road, town staff must reconcile their recommendations with NCDOT requirements.

Casadonte thanked the consultants and audience members who participated in the poll and discussion.

B. Unified Development Ordinance text amendment- Section 6.17 Sidewalks

Campbell said that staff had recently determined that the sidewalk section of the Unified Development Ordinance needed updates, in part due to identified sidewalk priorities in the new Comprehensive Sustainability Plan. When a developer encounters an obstacle to building a sidewalk such as a stream or topography challenge or finds there's no nearby sidewalk to connect to, there is currently no mechanism by which staff can authorize the developer to make a payment-in-lieu for construction. The payment-in-lieu would require the developer to get an estimate for the sidewalk construction and pay that amount, plus 25 or 50 percent to account for inflation, to the town. The money would be deposited in a fund earmarked for sidewalk construction within a certain rational distance of that property. Currently a payment-in-lieu is allowed only when the sidewalk is a low priority as identified in an outdated Orange County sidewalk plan that was essentially retired with the adoption of the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan.

Campbell shared two examples where developers were required to build sidewalks that did not connect to other sidewalks and where they were located. She explained that currently the only way to seek relief from the sidewalk requirement was by requesting a variance, a provision meant to address hardships and requires the developer to go before the Board of Adjustment. She said that there also used to be a waiver option, however developers were abusing the waiver and it was removed as an option some time ago.

Asked if the payment-in-lieu would mean the town would do the work to build the sidewalk, Campbell said the town could either do the work itself, give the money to an adjacent developer via contract to connect sidewalks, or give the money to the NCDOT to build infrastructure needed to support a sidewalk.

Campbell explained that the amendment provided more flexibility for staff to make determinations on the appropriateness of sidewalk construction based on environmental factors and the town's future connectivity goals. She pointed to the Gatewood property where situating a sidewalk in the right of way wasn't feasible and that sidewalk meanders due to topography. The amendment would allow staff to recommend or accept alternative compliance plans that provide equal or greater connectivity when developers submit a site plan.

Campbell clarified that a developer could ask for payment-in-lieu only if one of the exceptions in section 6.17.3.1 of the amendment applied and that developers would have to make a good case that building a sidewalk was not feasible.

Casadonte asked if the proposed changes were highlighted or italicized in the text. Campbell explained that staff rewrote the entire chapter and offered to include the old and new versions in the packet for the next meeting if the board wanted them. Board members said that wasn't necessary. Casadonte asked if the Orange County sidewalk plan would override town guidelines. Campbell explained that the town didn't have guidelines for sidewalks when the ordinance was first written in 2011-12, but the comprehensive sustainability plan now has a sidewalk priority plan.

Salvi asked if the 4-foot minimum width for planting strips was sufficient for trees. Campbell said that minimum width was the standard. Chandler asked if there was a metric for the number of required street trees. Campbell said there was one in the landscaping section of the Unified Development Ordinance.

Casadonte asked for other comments or questions from the board. There were none.

Motion: Schultz moved to send the amendment to the public hearing. Salvi seconded.
 Vote: 6-0.

5. Updates

A. Board of Adjustments

Iglesias said the next meeting is TBD.

B. Parks and Recreation Board

Member Alyse Polly was not present.

C. Staff and Board Members

Campbell said more than one member of the Hillsborough Board of Commissioners couldn't make the public hearing scheduled in July and that Mayor Jenn Weaver had suggested the Planning Board and town commissioners no longer schedule public hearings in July consistent with many boards taking that month off. Due to a scheduling conflict on August 17, Campbell proposed combining the July 20 public hearing and the August 17 board meeting into one public hearing meeting on August 10. When several members said they weren't sure about their availability, the board discussed the option of having another staff member cover for Campbell and make the August 17 meeting a public hearing. Campbell said she would check to see if that date worked for the town commissioners and if she could find another staff member to cover the meeting.

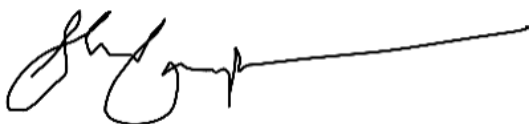
Motion: Chandler moved that Planning Board cancel its July meeting and tentatively schedule a public hearing on August 17. Schultz seconded.

Vote: 6-0.

6. Adjournment

Casadonte adjourned the meeting at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Shannan Campbell
 Planning and Economic Development Manager

Staff support to the Planning Board

Approved: January X, 2024

DRAFT