



**CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA**  
**MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**  
MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
**Tuesday, March 7, 2017**

**I. Call to Order: 7:00 p.m.**

Mr. Townes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. Roll Call**

Present:

Mrs. Hamilton

Mr. Hartson

Mr. Kohan

Mrs. Schiff

Mr. Townes

Absent:

Mr. Green

Mr. Kollman

Also Present:

Dr. Davis

Mr. Flippen

Mr. Fisher

**III. Determination of Quorum**

A quorum was determined.

**IV. Approval of Agenda**

Mrs. Schiff made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Kohan with all commissioners in favor.

**V. Approval of Minutes for January 4, 2017 meeting**

Mr. Townes asked for any corrections or deletions. Mr. Hartson moved for approval of the minutes as presented, Mrs. Schiff seconded the motion. All Commissioners were in favor with no additions or deletions.

**VI. Hearing of Citizens Generally**

None

**VII. Public Hearings**

- A. Planning Commission Resolution 17-1 - recommends to City Council the approval of Ordinance No. 17-8, which amends § 286-312.04 of Chapter 286, Zoning, of the City Code, by adding a cultural service use type to the permitted uses under civic use types in the IN Industrial District.

Dr. Davis stated that the resolution is adding a use type, Cultural Services, under Civic Use in the Industrial District of the Zoning Ordinance. Staff reviewed the Keystone Tractor Museum's need for continual special use permits for signs and any building additions and has recommended to allow Cultural Services in that Industrial District. The primary use of the building has transitioned into the museum. Each zoning district has Cultural Services listed as a civic use type and Industrial zoning is the only district that does not allow it. The Comprehensive Plan does not call for heavy industrial uses, only light uses.

Mr. Hartson moved to approve Resolution 17-1, Mrs. Schiff seconded.

**Vote:** 5-0

**Yes:**

Mrs. Hamilton  
Mr. Kohan  
Mr. Hartson  
Mrs. Schiff  
Mr. Townes

**No:** None

**Abstained:** None

**Motion:** PASS

Mr. Townes stated that Mr. Jones is a great corporate partner and is doing great things for veterans in the community.

**VIII. Plans of Development - Site Plan /Subdivision**

None

**IX. Old Business**

- A. Revitalization of housing stock – discuss residential tax abatement program

Dr. Davis stated that staff has researched the concept of a program that can be used to improve the City's housing stock.

Ms. Kelly Hall stated that the Planning Commission has asked staff to research a residential tax exemption program as an effective tool to incentivize the rehabilitation of the housing stock. The presentation has been divided into sections: overview, criteria and components, interviews from neighboring localities, logistics and implementation. First, the Code of Virginia allows a partial exemption for certain rehabilitation, renovation and replacement of residential structures. Typically, a property owner starts with an application; an assessment is conducted before work begins, or a baseline assessment is used; and an assessment is conducted after work is completed. Lastly, the amount of the tax exemption is determined, the exemption is established for a set period of time and established with the property.

Examples of details or requirements include the age of structure, which must be no less than 15 years of age. Staff did not do a comprehensive review of the programs throughout the state, but looked at 5-10 localities that are similar to explain a range of programs.

Dr. Davis noted approximately how many programs in Virginia exist.

Ms. Hall considered there to be an estimated 30 programs total and the average age of housing under consideration is 29 years. She continued that many localities have certain restrictions such as age, increased value percentage, increased square footage, and length of exemption. Staff will review which restrictions make sense for the City's future program.

She stated that staff conducted two case studies. The City of Lynchburg has three different programs: residential, commercial, and vacant lot partial tax exemption of rehabilitation.

Dr. Davis added that Colonial Heights does have language for commercial rehabilitation, which includes Southpark Mall and the Boulevard. The structure must be at least 20 years old as one of the criteria.

Ms. Hall stated that beyond the criteria already discussed, one key point is that the owner must not be delinquent on taxes. They would lose this benefit if this was the case and it has worked as an effective tool. Also, they only allow for one exemption for improvement of the structure at a time. Since Lynchburg's program started in 1983, 1,100 rehabilitations have occurred. It was stated in an interview that where it has been most useful in the downtown area where historic tax credits are already in place, this program becomes a tipping point for an investor financially. It was also stated that this program was underutilized and has not been publicized widely. She concluded that a blended feature was implemented where residential and commercial would both receive a credit depending on the use.

Mr. Hartson asked about the difference between a rehabilitation and a capital improvement in regards to eligibility.

Ms. Hall stated that the rehabilitation must increase the assessed value; outbuildings and landscaping do not increase value. Exterior cosmetic work may not meet the threshold of the required increase in assessed value.

Mr. Hartson stated that this program will not help people that have trouble maintaining their property.

Ms. Hall continued that Chesterfield County recently expanded their program to maximize all state benefits to make it the most beneficial in the state. A key point on this case study was that the County allows for a benefit 12 months after completion because they noticed that word of mouth has been a powerful marketing tool. Another interesting point is that Ettrick is one of the most beneficial neighborhoods for this program.

Dr. Davis stated that the department is willing to market the program, create pamphlets for renovation, and willing to do seminars to discuss the process if this program comes to fruition. The planning department cannot do the tax abatement itself and must partner with colleagues to show it as beneficial through the Council. The next step for the Commission, as an ordinance has to be written and approved through Council, may be sharing with Council the Commission's view of the program and staff can provide more detailed information at a work session.

Mr. Townes stated that based on an article in the paper, Chesterfield County has classes to educate the public.

Dr. Davis clarified that the Community Revitalization department has a community group that markets the education with the office and sponsors those events.

Mr. Townes continued that this has been discussed for a while. The Commission needs to keep the ball rolling and present to Council to give them a direction.

Mrs. Hamilton asked how staff decided which localities to interview.

Ms. Hall based her selections on neighboring localities and similar size localities.

Mr. Townes asked about the response from Finance or the Assessor's offices.

Ms. Hall stated that there may be hurdles with the program based on size of department.

Mr. Hartson stated that this may represent a loss in revenue.

Ms. Hall replied that taxes are being paid on original assessment and after the abatement period, taxes will be paid on the full increased value of the property.

Mr. Townes responded that assessments are based on comparables.

Ms. Hall stated that there is a distinction in some localities with an owner-owner program or an owner-renter program. If an investor is interested in the program, the buyer inherits the tax benefit. Landlords have an incentive for rental houses to increase in value, which helps with rate of return.

Mrs. Hamilton commented that home ownership brings stability to a neighborhood and the intent is to create a tool to stabilize neighborhoods.

Mrs. Schiff asked about the marketing of the commercial program.

Dr. Davis stated that staff can tell those applying for a permit about the program, but need pre approval before work is completed. The City has not been actively promoting the commercial program, but this can open the door to that.

Mr. Townes reiterated that if the City implements this program, the planning department should host a kickoff event with an article in the Progress-Index, with Ms. Hall explaining the program to the media so the public can start to see it. Staff will need to look at other outlets as well, such as television coverage. There will need to be a strong marketing program in place to inform the public effectively.

Mrs. Schiff asked in the case of the vacant Walgreens and Whataburger buildings that are represented by a realtor, would there be an abatement attached to it.

Mr. Townes stated that the City can print brochures to disseminate to the Southside Board of Realtors to peak interest. The decision to be made is what the next step is for the Commission.

Dr. Davis proposed that a letter written by the Commission stating that a program would help the housing stock.

Mrs. Schiff proposed that the Commission attend a course hosted by a neighboring locality as education.

Mr. Townes reiterated that he likes Chesterfield County's program and stated that the City will have a hard time getting people to participate by being restrictive. The commercial program is fairly restrictive and needs to be modified.

Mr. Hartson moved to have the Commission prepare and provide a letter to Council to outline this program, Mrs. Schiff seconded.

**Vote:** 5-0

**Yes:**

Mrs. Hamilton  
Mr. Kohan  
Mr. Hartson  
Mrs. Schiff  
Mr. Townes

**No:** None

**Abstained:** None

**Motion:** PASS

Dr. Davis concluded that staff will set up meetings with the Finance and Assessors' office in more detail.

**X. New Business/Reports**

Mr. Hartson stated that HHGregg is closing, the Sagebrush tenant space is empty, and JCPenney Home Store is empty. These are large blocks of empty space and he asked if the Economic Development office is contacting the larger stores about retention.

Dr. Davis commented that some of the information from economic development is proprietary.

Mr. Hartson replied that he would like Mrs. Epps to speak to Commission about the City's program to attract new tenants into vacant buildings.

Dr. Davis stated that a preliminary site plan was filed for the previous Lone Star Steakhouse location for next month's meeting.

Mr. Hartson asked about the outparcel next door to the aforementioned site.

Dr. Davis responded that there was interest in that subdivided outparcel in the parking area, but those parties did not follow through.

**Reports**

**1. Chairman**

None

**2. Director of Planning and Community Development – Dr. Davis**

Dr. Davis stated as of next month, a preliminary subdivision plat, two preliminary site plans, a special exception for the City's new radio system will come before the Commission. At the Council retreat in January, they took up the conversation of the local alcohol laws, and at this month's work session, they will address the section of the drafted letter by the Commission regarding the sale of beer and wine to follow the state code, which would no longer incorporate the blue law.

Mr. Townes questioned whether they would discuss other issues, such as allowing alcohol in the parks.

Dr. Davis stated that there needs to be further discussion classifying parks versus playgrounds and determining the permit process.

Mr. Townes asked how long it will take in staff's opinion.

Dr. Davis stated that it should not take too long.

Mr. Kohan brought up the point about liquor sales after midnight on Saturday.

Dr. Davis reiterated that it will follow the state law. There is a difference between on and off premises sales.

**3. City Engineer or Designee – Asst. Director of Public Works – Mr. Flippen**

Mr. Flippen stated that Public Works and Engineering is in the middle of roughly thirty projects. The Dupuy Avenue project is in the midst of utility relocation, as Columbia Gas is currently relocating lines. The City has made great strides with ROW acquisition on Lakeview Avenue and will wrap up in the next few weeks. There are four nonresponsive properties currently; the City is estimating construction to begin in October. In regards to the roundabout project, Kroger and Allan Myers Design Build for VDOT came to agreement to for Allan Myers to complete the Hamilton Avenue roadway improvements. Staff received a copy of letter sent last week asking Kroger for movement on that agreement, stating that if not received within 30 days, they will proceed with the improvements and Kroger will not be able to do public improvements. The City is hopeful the two parties will communicate. The City has procured LPDA to complete design work for landscaping for the roundabout. Staff has worked with the beautification committee that would match the signage and overall décor of the City's plan. They are anticipating a 90% plan in the next week and will need to move quickly, as planting and improvements to be installed with the roundabout as it is completed. The pavement preservation project, most notably reviewing the depressions at Temple Avenue and Charles Dimmock Parkway.

Mrs. Schiff commented that the City is extremely clean and she is appreciative of the cleanliness of the curbs. Secondly, there are road depressions at the intersection of Conduit Road and Ellerslie Avenue.

Mr. Flippen stated that the City received VDOT approval for revenue sharing for that specific improvement and are procuring services for the on-call contract for design.

Dr. Davis added that this is a project to pave, pedestrian accommodation, and signalization. The paving will extend up Conduit Road and Ellerslie Avenue to include approaches as well.

Mr. Hartson asked about the progress of the animal shelter capital improvement.

Mr. Townes confirmed that a preconstruction meeting will occur this week and that the project had been awarded.

**4. Others, as necessary or appropriate**

**a. City Attorney/ Acting City Manager – Mr. Fisher**

None

**XI. Adjournment**

Mr. Hartson moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mrs. Schiff with all Commissioners in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 P.M.



C. Scott Davis, LP.D.  
Secretary



Charles E. Townes  
Chairman