

MEETING NOTES

**Zoning Update-Technical Committee Meeting
Metropolitan Planning Commission
Surrency Meeting Room
January 16, 2008
3:00-5:00 PM**

I. Review December Minutes

The notes from the December 19, 2007 meeting were approved.

II. Component 2 (Administration)

The committee reviewed the final two draft sections from Component 2: Site Plans and Variances.

A. Site Development Plans (Revisiting)

The committee revisited the Site Plan section, which had been discussed previously at earlier meetings. At the December 11 special meeting, the MPC board expressed interest in taking a closer look at the proposed site plan review process. In particular, some members of the Planning Commission expressed concern regarding the proposed system of categorizing site plans as either simple, minor, or major plans. Under such a system, only major plans would be reviewed by the MPC board.

For comparison, the committee studied examples of site plan review processes from three other communities: Alachua County, FL; Memphis/Shelby County, TN; and Durham, NC. Several committee members expressed support for a Memphis-style process where the vast majority of site plans are reviewed at the staff level. It was pointed out that, although such a process would improve efficiency and predictability, it also represents a significant paradigm shift from the way that site plan review is currently administered in Savannah and Chatham County. Several committee members pointed out that the primary advantage of such a system would be that instead of focusing on site plans for individual properties, the MPC board would have more time and resources to devote to large-scale and long-range planning issues.

One way to keep the proposed system for site plan review, but still send more site plans to the MPC, would be to require MPC review in situations where non-residential uses are proposing to locate adjacent to residential uses. It was pointed out that a flaw in such a system would be that incompatibilities can exist between non-residential uses as well.

The issue of avoiding a “duplicate” review process was raised. An example of such a situation would be a development within the Landmark District that could be required to go through board-level review by the MPC and the Historic Review Board. To address this, the committee suggested keeping the current system where all site plan reviews within the Landmark District are handled at the staff level.

B. Variances

The committee expressed support for the idea of merging the City Zoning Board of Appeals with the County Zoning Board of Appeals. It is believed that expanding the board size to 8 members should alleviate quorum problems that the ZBAs have had in the past. Another principal reason for merging the boards is to promote consistency in decision-making. By having only one ZBA, we are able to avoid the situation of having two different boards with the exact same powers, meaning that an individual standard or requirement is less likely to be interpreted in two different ways.

The committee also expressed support for the idea of limiting variance powers to standards that are dimensional in nature, such as setbacks and building height. The current interpretation has been that all standards are variable, which could lead to the problem of the ZBA hearing cases that are not actually within their purview.

III. Introduction to Component 3 (Zoning Districts and Uses)

Staff presented an introduction to the next component of the Unified Zoning Ordinance: Zoning Districts and Uses. The committee will begin reviewing draft material from this section at the next meeting.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 20, at 3:00 PM.