

MEETING MINUTES

Unified Zoning Ordinance-Technical Committee Meeting
Metropolitan Planning Commission
Arthur Mendonsa Hearing Room
September 16, 2009
3:00-5:00 PM

Members Present: Gregori Anderson, Daniel Carey, Suzanne Cooler, Downer Davis, Bill Dawers, Tiras Petrea (for Randolph Scott), Bob Sebek, Peter Shonka, Ken Spriggs, Lise Sundrila, Ryan Thompson, Brian White

Members Absent: Beth Blalock, Rob Brannen, Bill Dempsey, Alderman Jeff Felser, Harvey Gilbert, Lee Grimes, Robin Haddock, Bridgit Lidy, MarRonde Lotson, Joe Marshall, Commissioner Helen Stone, Jon Todd, Malik Watkins

Staff Present: Michael Adams, Amanda Bunce, Debbie Burke, Geoff Goins, Charlotte Moore, Tom Thomson

I. August Minutes

Bill Dawers made a motion to approve the minutes from August. Gregori Anderson seconded the motion.

II. Update on Status

Charlotte Moore updated the committee on the various ordinances and other work that is underway. Ms. Moore stated that the first draft of the Off-Street Parking section has been completed and will be sent out for the October meeting. Staff will be discussing parking concepts with the committee at today's meeting. Amanda Bunce is working on the Landscaping, Screening, and Buffers section and Ms. Moore is working on a section that will address commercial development design standards. The first draft of this section should be completed by October. Of the 25 zoning maps for the City and County, there are four remaining maps for staff to review. Staff has been asked by the Chatham Environmental Forum to look into adding Mulch and Compost Processing Facilities as a regulated use in the UZO.

III. Planned Development District (Sec.6.1)

Charlotte Moore stated that this district is meant to be flexible and allow for unique and innovative design. A developer can propose what they want to do and negotiate with staff to create an appropriate

district. The Savannah River Landing project is an example of the type of development that would benefit from this district. Most properties are well suited to be governed by a base district, but Planned District will allow flexibility not found in base districts.

Staff debated whether a project had to have a mix of uses in order to be able to utilize this district but felt that there may be a residential-only development that is so unique that the flexibility would be necessary. The proposed ordinance allows for mixed use and single use residential projects within this district. The review process for this district is much like the rezoning process, with the master plan becoming the zoning for the district.

Tom Thomson asked if there would be a separate set of standards for each planned development like the New Hampstead PUD. Ms. Moore stated that there would be a set of standards for each planned development unique to that particular property.

Ms. Moore stated that there are basic development standards on pages two and three of the ordinance. There are some items that cannot be "waived" or "modified" and those are listed on page four. Ms. Moore indicated that Suzanne Cooler and Pete Shonka have requested an Infrastructure Master Plan, which has been included.

Ryan Thompson asked what the next step is after rezoning in this process. Ms. Moore stated that the site plan process would be the next step.

Mr. Thomson stated that engineering plans should not be required to be shown on the master plan (Editor's note: This has not been proposed).

Ken Spriggs suggested that if utilities need to be extended to the site that a narrative of how the site will be served be required rather than requiring plans designing the extension.

Mr. Thomson stated that if he was the system manager, he would want to be able to tell from the documentation submitted if he could serve them before approving the plans.

Downer Davis stated that it should be up to each user department to determine the necessary information that should be shown on the master plan. [Editor's note: the various City of Savannah infrastructure departments are referred to as "user departments"]

Suzanne Cooler mentioned that the Engineering Policy is in the process of being rewritten. She suggested that the infrastructure master plan requirements could be identified in that policy.

Ryan Thompson spoke of his experience with the master plan process for Bluffton. He suggested that staff look at the infrastructure master plan requirements for that community.

Ms. Moore stated that, while Sec. 6.1.9 will not be the location to establish the minimum criteria for the Infrastructure Master Plan, she will work with Mr. Shonka and Ms. Cooler to establish those minimums.

Bill Dawers asked if there would be a requirement to prove that there are adequate services to serve a site prior to approval. Ms. Moore stated that there have been discussions previously regarding an adequate public facilities ordinance and requiring developers to show that there is adequate capacity to serve their sites.

Mr. Dawers asked, in regards to the expiration date of a master plan, what counts as "construction". Ms. Moore stated that staff will need to define that term in the context of this ordinance. Ryan Thompson and Daniel Carey both expressed the opinion that definition will need to be reasonable, but substantial enough.

Mr. Spriggs stated that there needs to be some sort of a formula to prevent a situation where infrastructure is installed at a site and lots are being sold off but sales stop for two, four, or 10 years that the owner is not required to redo something that is already done. Mr. Thomson stated that staff will need to look into the legalities of this issue.

Ryan Thompson stated that his concern is if the lending institutions read the ordinance and it's not really well defined (i.e. ("construction")), they will not be willing to lend money for sales of/projects on these sites.

Mr. Spriggs stated that stormwater is the biggest issue, so if the site is properly designed to adequately accommodate the stormwater needs it should not matter if the project sits dormant for five years.

Mr. Davis stated that "clearing" should not constitute "construction" to establish a vesting. Mr. Spriggs further stated that there should be a limited amount of time between the time that you clear your property and when you have to start installing infrastructure so that people do not clear property and allow it to sit. Mr. Davis stated that the clearing of property will slow down if clearing is not considered a "substantial improvement". Ms. Moore asked if that standard should apply to all development, not just planned developments. Mr. Davis stated that it

should. Ms. Bunce clarified that that is an engineering policy, not a zoning policy. Ms. Cooler stated that that is Mr. Davis' point, to make the definition in this section clearly not include clearing as an option.

Ms. Moore noted that the proposed ordinance does not require a minimum lot size because a small lot may require the flexibility that the district affords, but staff will monitor if that needs to be changed in the future. Ms. Bunce stated that the intent of the planned district is not to allow a development to circumvent the zoning ordinance and the standards of the base districts. It is to be utilized solely for unique circumstances. Ms. Moore said that the process will take more money and time, so that should discourage a developer from misusing the district.

Ryan Thompson asked if the accessibility to nonresidential uses (Sec. 6.1.6.g) requires pedestrian and vehicular cross access. Ms. Moore stated yes.

Tiras Petrea asked what involvement MPC staff would have in the review of signs associated with the comprehensive sign package for a planned development. Ms. Moore stated that she did not anticipate any review by MPC staff. The approved sign standards would be provided to the City or County staff for their use in reviewing signage.

IV. Access Management, Circulation and Connectivity (Sec. 9.2)

Amanda Bunce introduced the section. She stated that the purpose is to regulate the ingress and egress points of a development and to require cross access easements where appropriate. The number and width of driveways based on land use and road type are also addressed in this ordinance.

Michael Adams summarized the requirements of this section. He indicated that the Governing Body Engineer can make exceptions to certain requirements in this section based on varying circumstances of the site.

Ryan Thompson pointed out that Sec. 9.2.9.a.ii needs to be broken out into two bullets. The current formatting makes it appear that 20 foot width requirement only applies to emergency gates.

Daniel Carey asked how staff came up with the 125 foot separation requirement between curb cuts. Mr. Adams stated that is an ITE standard. Mr. Carey asked if that is an old or recent standard. Mr. Adams stated that it is a newer standard. Ms. Bunce indicated that there would be about half as many curb cuts on the picture she had

previously shown demonstrating "Excessive Curb Cuts" on Abercorn Street.

Ryan Thompson asked if this applied only to group developments or if it included individual lots. If it applies to all lots, how are you to get your neighbor to agree to a cross access easement? Ms. Bunce stated that it would apply to all lots and would require that adjacent lots stub out as they are developed and provide cross access easements on these internal roads.

Mr. Spriggs stated that with this new policy, parcels would not come all the way to the street because of these access roads which would result in the parcels being "shortened". Mr. Thomson described some of the internal circulation problems at the Lowe's site on Abercorn and provided suggestions for how to redesign the internal network to address those problems. Possible solutions included bringing the internal access road closer to the buildings to allow a greater stacking distance between the access points at Abercorn. Mr. Spriggs clarified that if the access road is located further into the parcel, there could be an outparcel; regardless, it could not access the main road. Ryan Thompson stated that most outparcels are about 250 feet in depth so that is not a restrictive standard. The bigger issue is the cross access requirement.

Mr. Thomson stated that the problem of having one access point for fast food restaurants is that they will have to loop their drive thru lane internally.

Mr. Spriggs stated that the Fire Department should review this standard to make sure it will provide adequate access. Ms. Bunce stated that access is reviewed by the Fire Department.

Ryan Thompson asked if the 125 foot standard only applies to arterial roads. If so, Figure 9.2-1 should be changed to say "arterial road" rather than "public road". Ms. Moore stated that staff would look at that.

Mr. Carey asked about the residential driveway width of 12 feet. He stated that seemed wide and asked about the width of a standard lane. Mr. Adams stated that a lane is 12 feet. Mr. Dawers asked if that is the minimum width in the historic district. He stated that the driveways are not 12 feet and they would not want 24 foot wide lanes. Ms. Bunce stated that can be addressed in the overlay district because some districts require different standards than others.

Mr. Petrea stated that the current zoning ordinance only specifies the dimensions of parking spaces (9 feet wide by 18 feet long), so if a

property owner wants side by side parking they have to have at least 18 feet in width. The Traffic Engineering standard is different; they require 25 feet in width. Enforcement staff is trying to figure out how to handle it since the zoning ordinance is silent in regards to single family parking standards. Mr. Davis questioned why there should be a minimum dimension as long as there is a dust free surface. He stated that on Tybee some properties have paver strips. Why wouldn't that be allowed? Ms. Cooler stated that only pertains to the area adjacent to the right-of-way. The apron is the only part that has to be paved.

Ms. Moore stated that we have to keep in mind that there are some districts that do not want side by side parking. Mr. Dawers stated that there are problems with the loss of on street parking in some areas because of larger driveway widths and the amount of separation between driveways. It becomes physically impossible to have parking spaces on street.

Mr. Petrea stated that when the parking section is drafted, it would be beneficial to have some details for single family parking standards. He also indicated that the word "not" needed to be added to section 9.2.7.d.

Ms. Moore asked those that have done residential development if they think that there will be a problem with section 9.2.11 (street connectivity requirements). Mr. Thomson stated that it was problematic in the past. Ms. Bunce clarified that the thresholds have been changed since it was last proposed. Mr. Davis stated that he did not think there would be too many complaints due to the increased thresholds and the fact that the second access can be designed for emergency access only. Ms. Cooler stated that staff should check with the Fire Department to verify that the standard that allows "buffering" of the emergency access is acceptable. Ms. Bunce stated that they will ask the Fire Departments to review the standards.

Mr. Petrea asked whether Figure 9.2.2 will be the new site distance triangle. Ms. Bunce stated that this figure only applies to residential driveways. Mr. Petrea stated that it is good to have it broken down by use, as there is only one standard currently. Mr. Thomson asked where those standards are presently located. Mr. Petrea stated that they are in the zoning ordinance and the technical design manuals. Mr. Thomson stated that we should not duplicate information and take the chance that it will be altered in one and not the other and have conflicting standards.

Ryan Thompson asked how street is defined in regards to Figure 9.2.1. Does the internal street have to be designed to a public street? He

proposed replacing "internal street" with "cross access" for the diagram. He also asked where the internal street had to be stubbed to and if the ordinance stated that. Mr. Thomson stated that it should say something similar to "stubbed to a location jointly determined". Ms. Bunce stated that the intent is for the driveway/internal street to be stubbed out at the property line.

V. Off-Street Parking and Loading (Sec. 9.3)

Ms. Moore introduced the Off-Street Parking and Loading section and explained that staff has not provided the Committee with a draft of the section as they are only discussing concepts at today's meeting. Geoff Goins stated that the intent of the proposed ordinance is to provide flexibility in order to encourage innovative design, update the parking requirements to reflect actual usage, and put a greater emphasis on alternative means of transportation. Mr. Goins stated that there will be greater flexibility for shared parking and that he has created a table and formula for calculating what is required. The current language is vague.

Ms. Cooler asked how it will be enforced if uses change on sites with shared parking. Mr. Goins stated that the ordinance will require adequate area to be held in green space to provide the additional parking if needed. The ordinance does not eliminate the parking requirement.

Mr. Goins stated that the remote parking standards will allow remote parking to be further from the user site. Lise Sundrla asked if peripheral parking is what is meant when Mr. Goins says 600 feet and a quarter mile. Mr. Goins stated that if public parking is within 600 feet or a quarter mile of the property, remote parking can be used. Parking should be "uncoupled" from zoning and should be based on geography. Mr. Thomson asked Mr. Goins to explain what he means by "uncouple". Ms. Moore stated that parking standards should be removed from zoning districts and addressed in a different manner. Currently there are districts that require no parking and individuals will request a rezoning to that designation in order to have that parking standard when the district may not be the most appropriate. Parking should not be tied to zoning.

Ms. Sundrla stated that in order to encourage the construction of additional residential and Class A office space, there should be the option to pay into a parking fund to provide remote parking structures in the downtown area. Mr. Spriggs stated that the problem with utilizing remote parking structures is that if it not monitored appropriately, the capacity can be exceeded. He asked how all the condos that are

currently sitting vacant are handled, are they grandfathered? Will they be exempt even if the garages are at capacity or will they be required to provide spaces? Pete Shonka stated that he does not believe they would be grandfathered under the current permitting process. Mr. Spriggs asked if he came in as a property owner after another building that had not been required to provide parking, would he had to provide parking? Mr. Goins clarified that the parking exemption may not be based on the underlying district, but on an overlay district instead. Mr. Goins showed a map of the area that might be the area covered by a parking overlay. Ms. Sundrla asked if the map is what is being called the "urban area". Ms. Bunce explained that area is still to be defined, but there will be a map identifying the overlay zone. Mr. Petrea asked if the Mid-City standards would apply. Mr. Goins stated that there are a couple options for addressing parking in the downtown area. Ms. Moore stated that the Mid-City ordinance exempted a certain amount of nonresidential square footage before requiring parking, but it is not necessary in the new ordinance to use only one methodology. It is a very complex issue and may need a mix.

Ms. Sundrla stated that some businesses want to "overkill" with their parking, using a suburban model for parking. How can you keep somebody from having excessive parking in a walkable community? Mr. Spriggs stated that a prime example of where that could happen is at the old Sears building. Mr. Thomson stated that he has given the following comments to staff in regards to parking: maximums not minimums especially in the downtown and establish a parking fee for the construction of parking garages; only one parking space per residence; and, more emphasis on transit in downtown. In suburban areas there are two levels. On one level, there is too much parking but on the other, there is the need to "reserve" spaces in green areas in case a high parking demand use such as medical services comes in. Ms. Moore stated that defining maximums is difficult. She described a situation at a southside restaurant where patrons often park in the lot of an adjacent retail store because of insufficient parking spaces at certain times. Even with no maximum requirement presently in place, sometimes business owners can't always be certain of their own maximum needs. Mr. Goins further explained that arbitrarily establishing a maximum may hurt a business if there are no other viable alternative modes of transportation in the area. Mr. Thomson clarified that he proposed capping them at maximum in the downtown area, not in suburban areas.

Ms. Sundrla asked about counting on street parking spaces. Ms. Moore stated that has been problematic in the past. Ms. Bunce stated that the Mid-City ordinance allows for some on street parking to count towards required parking and there are a lot of factors that do not guarantee

those spaces will be available. Ms. Sundrla stated that Savannah has the unique situation of having multiple "main streets" and that needs to be taken into consideration. Mr. Goins stated that, in the downtown area, the number of spaces might not be the issue as much as the design. Mr. Carey asked if we are getting into the design because the design standards of the historic districts are good now. Mr. Bunce stated that staff will be using those standards. Ms. Sundrla stated that design standards might be able to be enhanced with information from the Downtown Master Plan.

Mr. Dawers stated that, within certain buildings or zones, residential parking permits should be denied. [Editor's note: Residential parking permits allow residents to park all day for free within two blocks of their home. This can include areas such as Broughton Street.] He also stated that there should be a maximum lot width established for how wide a surface parking lot can be at the street.

Mr. Dawers stated that there should be stricter standards regarding the elimination of on street parking spaces. Mr. Thomson stated that the City has indicated that they will be implementing the recommendations of the parking study. Mr. Spriggs stated that, on his block, there is an entire block designated for buses only prohibiting any on street parking. Rarely are there any buses in those spots. Mr. Dawers stated that there are a lot of freight zones, cab lots, etc. that could be used to regain a lot of parking spaces. Ms. Sundrla stated that utilizing reverse angle parking on Johnston Square will gain nine additional parking spaces.

Ms. Bunce asked the Committee what their feelings are in regards to how to address parking- exempt by geographic area, certain uses, or other ideas? Mr. Dawers stated that if the City does not try to restrict residential parking on commercial streets such as Broughton, then it will be problematic for retailers. There is a lot of parking in the downtown area with construction of the new garage. Mr. Spriggs suggested that there could be a different rate for residents to park in the garages. Ms. Sundrla stated that the peripheral parking garage (Liberty) is a reduced fee of \$35 to encourage parking there and free up spaces in the other garages. Mr. Dawers indicated that there is plenty of parking available in the new garage, so it would be appropriate to allow reduced rates for residents to park in the garage.

Ms. Moore stated that whatever staff drafts may be an interim solution because it is depending on the City implementing the parking study. The issue may need to be reevaluated in the future to see if the City is implementing the study. Mr. Dawers stated that it will probably also have to be reevaluated when all the buildings that are vacant right now fill up.

Ms. Bunce stated that it will have to be discussed further, but the standards will probably be a hybrid of different methods. Mr. Goins stated that staffs' preference is the first option (Creating an overlay district in which a portion of downtown would be exempt and the other subject to the urban standards.) Ms. Moore stated that it could just be a geographic area rather than an overlay district in order to avoid somebody applying for the overlay district for their property. Ms. Bunce stated that the overlay district could be tied to a geographic area that would require a text amendment to change. Mr. Dawers stated that the question is will the City enforce the study. Staff will have to make some assumptions in drafting the ordinance.

VI. Zoning Map Areas

No maps were reviewed due to time constraints.