



CITY OF DELAWARE CITY  
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**MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION  
CITY OF DELAWARE CITY  
Monday, October 1, 2018 – 6:30 p.m.  
City Council Chamber  
407 Clinton Street**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Snow called to order the regular meeting of the Planning Commission (PC) at 6:33 p.m. Commissioners Dilliplane, Smith, Starrett and Renoll were in attendance. Also present were City Manager Houck and City Secretary Hanna.

**ACTION ON THE PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Commissioner Dilliplane made the motion to accept the minutes from the September 10, 2018 meeting as written. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all ayes, motion carried.

**REVIEW OF ORDINANCE TO AMEND CITY CODE SECTION 46-31 TO CHANGE THE DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS IN THE HPR DISTRICT FOR QUARTERMASTER PLACE**

City Manager told the Commissioners the Fort Corporation has had inquiries if the area could have a less intense use; a wider variety of homes as in Officer's Row. Commissioners discussed the effects this will have and found nothing as a downside. These modifications would be in the HPR district only and the positive side is more variety of homes and a resulting increase in tax base.

Commissioner Dilliplane made the motion to accept the Ordinance as written. Commissioner Renoll seconded the motion. The motion was passed with all ayes.

## DISCUSSION & PRESENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

City Manager Houck introduces Mr. David Turley, Chairperson of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). She said the concerns raised at the last meeting about historic preservation warranted Commissioner Turley's attendance as he may have additional goals and strategies to input into that portion of the Comp Plan.

Commissioner Turley has been on the HPC since 2012 and recently became Chair. He is also on the Fort DuPont's HPC and is able to combine the two. What he is presenting to the PC tonight is a 5-year distillation of conversations from HPC's growing concerns over:

- The deterioration of homes in Delaware City
  - The considerable money that is being invested in Fort DuPont
- Commissioner Turley says the recommendations are generalized at this point but what is believed to be best for the two sides to complement each other.

### Strategies & Goals:

- Possibility of combining the two (2) HPC's into one. Obviously this will take some time to accomplish
- Mandate to prevent deterioration and ultimate destruction of homes. As of now HPC can only make recommendations but not able to enforce.
- Implement policies to assist homeowners and landlords to stop the decline in a phased-in deliberate fashion.
- Language to be inserted in Comp Plan that addresses the need to mandate and assist homeowners and landlords
- Establish minimum standards for conditions

Commissioner Starrett agrees it is not too much to ask a homeowner to preserve their home. It's a matter of how to enforce it. Commissioner Turley adds in preservation keeping the exterior of homes in good condition is important. Discussion followed about how other cities have dealt with this issue. Others made the decision they wanted to be a place where tourists wanted to visit and raised their average income level of their residents: i.e. higher level of education; reduction of drugs and crime. If we put into the master plan making it a goal to preserve the properties there can be other ancillary benefits. Decision and enforcement must come from Mayor & Council.

- Bank owned vacant homes:

Commissioner Turley drafted a letter to be sent to the banks holding these homes advising that fines and penalties would be levied against the banks who are not actively working to sell the property.

City Manager Houck adds that this letter would be sent to banks and other entities holding not only historical homes but any home that is being held for sale explaining the negative impact they are having on our community.

Mayor Green reminds the Commissioners that a few years ago all the vacant houses were listed. At last Mayor & Council Meeting it was mentioned again and City Secretary has been challenged find out who the owners are. Then in addition review with our City Solicitor and draft legislation to be able to enforce actions against the banks.

Discussion continued on ways to deal with bank owned vacant homes. Mayor Green explains how Citi Bank handles it. Need to learn what the banks' terms are and deal from there. Commissioner Dilliplane wondered if on the State level legislation could be written that would limit the time banks can hold those homes.

- Attempt to increase business viability in Delaware City. Businesses that will be going in at Fort DuPont have more resources. We should be looking for long term goals to help business owners.
- Motivations: our tax revenues are not high enough to give back and grants are not always significant enough to help a homeowner with the restoration that's necessary.

Commissioner Snow relates her efforts to maintain the exterior of her home and the rising costs each time and cautions against being so strict that people wouldn't be able to keep up with the costs. Commissioner Turley believes there are ways to follow the statutes but not necessarily the laws to allow substitutions of materials that are affordable. Commissioner Snow feels HPC has been given a bad reputation.

City Manager Houck said from Commissioner Turley's information goals and strategies will be developed and reviewed after the HPC has their November meeting and return to the PC in December.

Before moving on to the next section, Commissioner Dilliplane asked City Manager Houck if she knew what the home sales projections are from Fort DuPont. City Manager replied at this time the Fort is projecting five (5) a year with a total of 10 by 2020. The builder's projection is 20 lots a year with a total of 40 lots by 2020. It does not appear to make a huge impact on the population at once.

Questions about water and sewer were also answered. There will be no water income as the Fort sold the rights to Artesian. The sewer will be through New Castle County and maintained and upgraded by the County. Tax revenue from the homes will contribute to the Police Department.

## **2-5 Government & Community Services & Facilities**

- Cable Television & Internet Service:

Commissioner Starrett brings up the old cable wires coiled up and left behind. He is not sure if its cable tv or telephone. On First and Clinton Street is an

approximately 80-foot coil laying there. City Manager Houck said we have to identify the poles and who owns them then reach out to have them come and remove it.

- Police

Commissioner Dilliplane remarked the new Police Officer started today. City Manager Houck said the Chief is still recruiting in the attempt to achieve the goal and be in compliance with the FY19 budget.

City Manager Houck explains there is no contract for the newly hired police but if they leave before 5-years they must reimburse the City for what it has cost to train the officer. Mayor Green explains how and why there is turnover on small forces because they can't afford the benefits. City Manager Houck added that an agreement is being worked on for the future hires.

It was suggested relocating the Police Department to be more central to the business district may help to be a deterrent to crime.

**GOAL – To improve home values**

City Manager Houck announced a new part-time Code Enforcer will be starting soon. He will address all homes, not just historic. Her expectation is for the Code Enforcer to make personal contact first and cited a recent event of having done so.

**Strageties**

The Commissioners discussed many incentives to enhance the town's appearance and become a possible attraction to draw visitors and potential residents to town: flags on the phone poles along Clinton Street; flowerpots, birdhouses; historic registry plates on the homes, etc.

The pros and drawbacks of having underground lines that although would make for more attractive appearance money was needed in other areas at this time.

**2.6 Recreation and Open Space**

Commissioners Dilliplane, Starrett and Smith discussed the municipal dock's deteriorating condition. City Manager said perhaps they could tag on with the Refinery when they have the area dredged to work on the docks.

**Goals:**

- To improve municipal docks and to implement regular maintenance.
- Trails: Mayor Green answered Commissioner Dilliplane's question that the State is responsible for the maintenance of the trail and are aware of the areas that are sinking.
- To develop an all-weather access between Fort DuPont and Delaware City. Various ideas have been suggested but none has been selected.

- Canoe and Kayak Launch – turned over to Dragon Run
- Bike path trail head connectors

City Manager said the Parking Task Force had discussed identifying the trail heads and made the suggestion that all should look alike; signage at parking lots; and Community Center parking area be specified for trail parking.

The cost of signage was discussed and the suggestion by Commissioner Dilliplane to use the bulletin board in Battery Park as a trailhead sign. Commissioner Snow suggested Maisey's Market be commissioned to paint the signs that are needed at the foot bridge, Kathy's and Washington Street.

Discussion of the pros and cons of bikes on the sidewalk and one-way streets followed. As a point for a business in town, Commissioner Snow mentioned a young realtor who is interested in opening a bike shop. This would be a two-way benefit: new business in town and an attraction for people coming over from Fort Mott or just coming into town to rent bikes to tour the town.

Commissioner Renoll mentioned the public toilets facilities are needed. City Manager Houck said she is waiting for the agreement with Parks on keeping the Ferry Office's rest rooms open. Commissioner Dilliplane asked if it could be negotiated that Fort Delaware stay open longer and promote more tour group activities.

Another idea to draw in tourist is to hold an open air art show however Delaware City does not have the staff to promote these ideas. These are things to bring to the attention of Main Street to work on.

The question was raised if Delaware City was receiving money from the activities that take place at Fort DuPont. City Manager replied the revenue goes into the restoration funds but Delaware City does receive money for the permits for the activities.

Commissioner Dilliplane suggested a strategy that we look into things to promote activity that can be done for little/no cost. And, a goal for next year to promote ourselves better. One way to accomplish the promotion is to update the website advertising the tourism.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Dilliplane made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Bonnie Lynn Hanna*

City Secretary